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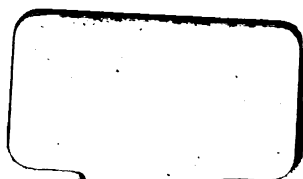
QUEENIE'S WHIM

MISS CAREY.



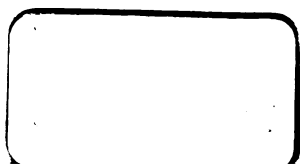


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QUEENIE'S WHIM

A Novel

BY

ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

AUTHOR OF

"NELLIE'S MEMORIES," "WOODED AND MARRIED,"
ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen

1881

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251. i. 198.

B u n g e y :

CLAY AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS.

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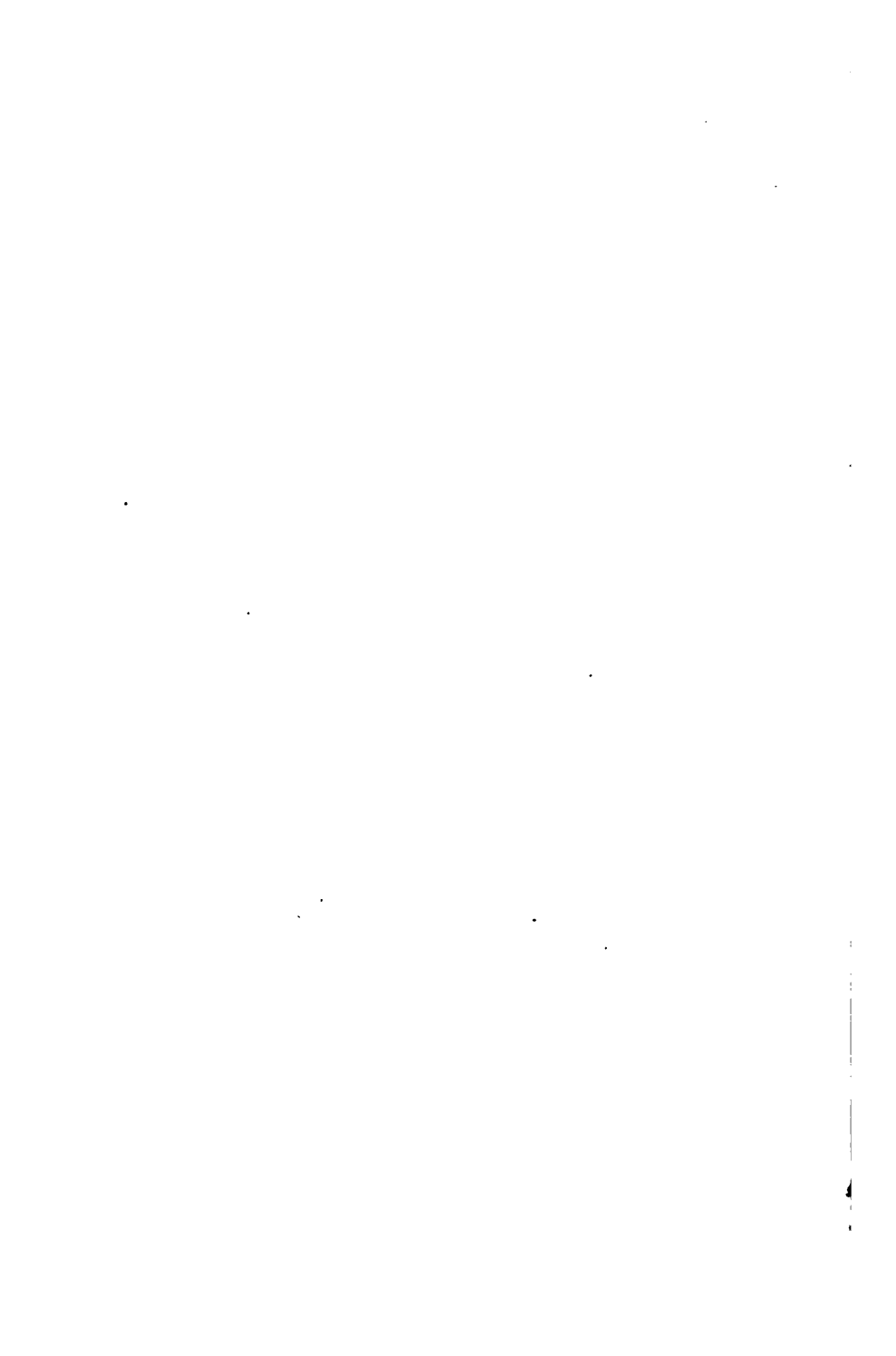
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QUEENIE'S WHIM.

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CHAPTER I.

IN THE GLOAMING.

"So she loved, and she was happy,
As if walking in Paradise;
Nay, as heaven he seemed above her,
This love of her own heart's choice.
It was not his birth or riches,
But that he was born to bless,
With the treasure of his wisdom,
And the wealth of his tenderness."

Isa Craig-Knox.

DORA'S sleep was quite peaceful and unbroken, while Garth tossed restlessly on his bed half the night, staring open-eyed into the darkness. She came down in the morning in her pretty travelling dress looking as fresh and bright as possible.

She was not even pale as she had been the previous evening ; possibly the excitement of last night had stimulated her, and roused her from her sadness.

She was thinking more of Flo than of Garth this morning. With all her coolness of judgment, and her disposition to meddle in all things spiritual and material, Dora dearly loved her young sisters, and was warmly beloved by them in return. Beatrix was at times almost too much for her, with her helplessness and impulsive ways, but Flo was to her as the apple of her eye.

"My poor Flo, I hope they will not have cut off her hair, papa," she observed, tenderly ; "she has such pretty hair, though it is darker than mine."

"Ah, Dorrie, my dear, it is a bad business I fear," returned her father mournfully. "I always said that I disliked those foreign schools ; and then those German doctors !"

"Now, papa, it is only Beattie's absurd letter has made you so faint-hearted," replied Dora cheerfully, "as though girls of seventeen are to be trusted, and Beattie especially !"

"I think Beatrix is remarkably sensible for her age," observed Garth in a caustic tone. "I cannot understand your always under-valuing her; in my opinion she has twice the amount of common sense that Florence has," he went on in a contradictory manner.

Garth had slept badly, a rare occurrence in his healthy, well-regulated life, and one that he was likely to remember for a long time with a sense of injury; and he was irritable in consequence, and in a bad humor with himself and all the world. Nothing would have pleased him better this morning than a downright quarrel with Dora; but Dora's perfect temper was invulnerable.

"That only shows how men judge of girls' characters," she returned, with a little shrug and an amused smile. "Because Beattie is better looking, and has a nice complexion, she is endowed with a double portion of common sense. Oh, you men!" shaking her head and laughing in a pitying sort of way.

"We men are tolerably hard in our judgment sometimes," returned Garth, looking at her with

a gleam of anger in his eyes ; but Dora took no notice of the ill-concealed sarcasm.

It was so natural for him to feel sore, poor fellow, under the circumstances. She thought it would want a good deal of coaxing and *finesse* to charm him into good humor again. She was very considerate and mindful of his comfort throughout the whole of breakfast-time, sweetening and preparing his coffee with extra care, and even bringing him some favorite sauce with her own hands ; but her little overtures towards reconciliation were all rejected. Garth put the sauce away somewhat ostentatiously, and bore himself as though he had received an injury for which there could be no forgiveness. He stood aloof as the servants crowded round the door and the young mistress dispensed her parting injunction. When the luggage was on the carriage, and the Vicar had taken down his felt hat, he came forward and handed Dora into the carriage with much dignity. •

“I hope you will have a tolerably pleasant journey, and find the invalid better,” he said very gravely ; “please give my love to Beatrix.”

He had not spoken more than a dozen words throughout the whole of breakfast time, but he could not forbear this parting thrust.

"And not to Flo! not to poor darling Flo!" returned Dora, looking at him with reproachful sweetness. "Oh, you poor fellow, I am so sorry for you," her eyes seemed to say, as she waved her hand, and the carriage disappeared down the village.

Garth threw his portmanteau into the dog-cart somewhat vehemently when it came up to the door. The old nurse put her hand on his arm with the familiarity of a trusted friend, and tried to detain him, but he was in no mood for her garrulity.

"Dear Miss Dora, she is a blessing to us all, is she not, Mr. Clayton? such a pretty creature, and with such wise, womanly ways; for all the world like her mother," cried nurse, with the ready tear of old age trickling down her wrinkled cheek. "The others are dear girls, bless their sweet faces, but they are not equal to Miss Dora."

"Of course not, nurse; there could not be two

such paragons in one house," returned Garth, squeezing the old woman's hard hand, and trying to whistle as he mounted to his seat and took the reins in hand, but the whistle was a failure. He looked up at the porch-room somewhat bitterly as he drove off. He was shaking off the dust of the place from his feet, so he told himself, but there was a hard, resentful pain at his heart as he did so.

No one knew what to make of the young master when he appeared hot and dusty at the works. Two or three of the men had been soundly rated for some slight omission of duty, and one of the severest lectures that he had ever received from his brother had been dinned into Ted's astonished ear.

"I am sick of your laziness and want of punctuality; if you cannot fulfil your duties properly you must find work elsewhere," stormed the young master of Warstdale. With all his sweet temper, Ted had much ado not to flare up and get into a passion.

"Haven't we all caught it nicely at the works! there is a screw loose somewhere," observed Ted

confidentially to his sisters that evening, as Garth drove the dog-cart round to the stables.

The brothers had driven home from the quarry in perfect silence, and Ted, who was still a little sore over the rating he had received, had made no attempt to promote cheerfulness.

"I hope there is nothing wrong between him and Dora," observed Langley, dropping her work a little anxiously.

Poor soul, her own troubles had made her nervous; but on that point Ted could not enlighten her. Evidently Garth had attempted to recover his temper, for he came in presently, and greeted his sisters affectionately.

"I hope you have lost your headache, Langley?" he said, as he took up the paper knife and the latest periodical, and withdrew with them to the window.

"Did you see them off? Have they had any better accounts of Florence? You look tired and done up, Garth," enquired his sister anxiously.

"Yes; they went off all right. Miss Cunningham sends her love to you and Cathy. They made

me very comfortable as usual, and gave me my old room."

Garth was trying to read by the evening light, and his face was hidden.

"One is always comfortable at the Vicarage; Dora is such a capital manager," returned Langley, feeling her way in feminine fashion. "Poor girl, Florence's illness must be a sad trial to her."

"Humph! she takes it as coolly as she does most things. When are the lights coming, and what has become of tea?" demanded Garth, a little irritably; and Langley knew that she was not to ask any more questions.

A good night's rest did much towards restoring Garth's outward equanimity, but he still chafed secretly under the mortification he had undergone with a soreness that surprised himself. The check he had received had angered and embittered him. He was not in love with Dora, after the usual interpretation of the word; nevertheless, her yoke lay heavy upon him. The friendship between them had grown with his growth; he had learned to see with her eyes, and read with

her judgment. In a cool, temperate sort of way he had loved and wooed her from his earliest manhood. He had been a trifle indifferent to women in general. When the time came to take a wife, that wife should be Dora.

But now the plan of his life was disarranged. He had waited long enough, and now he told himself that no more time should be given her ; he would shake off the dust of the place from his feet ; he would bear himself as a stranger towards her and her belongings ; but even while his indignation was hot within him, he knew that such resolution would be vain. Not even now had he wholly relinquished all hopes of her. True, she had sinned against him, and the gravity of the offence demanded a fitting punishment. Well, he would hold aloof from her, and treat her on all occasions with studied coldness, until she would rid herself of this womanish folly, and capitulate on his own terms. Then, and then only, would he forgive her, and raise her to the former measure of his favor. The surrender on her part must be total. There should be no softness, no half-measures, no conciliating persuasion on his ; for

the future it should be yea, yea, or at least nay, nay, between them. Garth was just in that dangerous mood when a straw might decide the current of his will, when a trifle might widen the breach which a word at one time could have spanned. Dora had little idea of the danger she risked when she sent her lover from her discontented and dissatisfied. "You may find it very difficult to recall me, Dora," he had said to her, with some instinctive prevision of the truth, but she had not believed him.

For the first time the young master of Warstdale found himself restless and unhappy; his sleepless night still abided in his mind as an undeserved and lasting injury. The next day had set in wet and stormy; heavy autumnal rains swept across the moors, and flooded the country road, and the little straggling town of Hepshaw. Garth had driven himself and Ted in the same taciturn fashion from the quarry, and both had entered the house, shivering and uncomfortable, in their dripping garments.

"Oh you poor dear creatures," cried Cathy, flying out into the hall to receive them; but Ted

waved her off gravely, and shook himself like a wet Newfoundland.

“Talk not of wasted young raindrops ! these raindrops never are wasted.

If they enrich not the coat of my brother, their waters returning
Back to my hat, shall fill it full of brown moisture ;
For that which the Ulster sends forth returns again to the oil-cloth.

Patience, accomplish thy labor ; accomplish thy shaking, my brother ;

Broad-cloth and buckskin are strong, and patience and muscle are stronger.’ ”

“ Bosh,” growled Garth in a sulky undertone, as he pushed past him somewhat curtly.

Ted shook his head mournfully.

“ ‘ I knew a young man nice to see,’ ”

continued the incorrigible boy ;

“ ‘ Beware ! beware !

Trust him not, he will bully thee ;

Take care ! take care ! ’ ”

“ Whatever is the matter with him, Teddie dear ? ” asked his sister coaxingly.

“ Hush ! ” in a melodramatic tone ; “ meddle not with mysteries that belong not to thy female province, Catherina mia. How do you know what dark deed fetters the conscience of that

unhappy young man? Did you remark the gleam in his eye, the frown on his brow, as he rushed past me just now? remorse only could have kindled that fury. Dora and despair speak in every feature."

"Oh do be quiet, you ridiculous boy, and give me a sensible answer."

But nothing was farther from Ted's purpose. His aggravated feelings needed some outlet. And when Garth made his appearance, refreshed and re-habited, he found Cathy sitting on the stairs in fits of merriment, while Ted strutted to and fro spouting pages of nonsense.

He stopped and looked a little foolish at this sudden apparition; but his brother took no notice of his confusion.

"If you keep your wet things on any longer you will have an attack of rheumatism," he remarked coldly, as he made his way past them to the hall door. Both of them started as it slammed violently after him.

"Where has he gone in all this rain?" asked Cathy, in much distress, but Ted only shrugged

his shoulders, and tried not to look pleased. For once his brother's absence was a relief.

Garth was in no mood to-night for his sisters' society and Ted's ceaseless fire of puns. The quiet home evening, with its work and music and gentle gossip, would have jarred on him in his present state of mind. It was true, Langley's tact was seldom at fault, and the others could be chided and frowned into silence; but still he would have been loath to mar their enjoyment. He was jaded and tired; the day's work had been done against the grain, and he needed rest and refreshment sorely. Some impulse, for which he could not account, led him across to the cottage.

The rain was still falling heavily as he plodded down the miry lane; but a warm, welcoming gleam shone enticingly from one lattice window across the road. He would step in and surprise them, he thought, as he gently lifted the latch. He and Cathy often stole upon them in this way; they liked to see Emmie's delighted clap of the hands and Queenie's pleased start when they looked up and saw their friendly intruder.

The door of the parlor stood open. He was in full possession of the pretty, homely picture long before they saw him standing on the threshold. Tea was on the little round table, but the candles were still unlighted ; Emmie was curled up on the rocking-chair, watching Queenie, as she knelt on the rug with a plate of crisp white cakes in her hand.

They were evidently some *chef-d'œuvre* of her own. She was still girded with her cooking apron ; the firelight shone on her white, dimpled arms and flushed face ; all sort of ruddy gleams touched her brown hair. She gave a little satisfied laugh as she regarded the cakes.

"They are just as light as Mrs. Fawcett's, are they not, Emmie ?"

"Yes, they are lovely ; you are quite a genius, Queen ; but do go on with the story, we have just come to the interesting part. Poor Madeleine ! you must make it end happily. I never, never could bear a sad finish."

"Those sort of stories never end happily," returned Queenie, in a musing tone, shielding her face from the flame ; "they are just like life

in that. We have no King Cophetuus now-a-days to endow poor maidens with their nobleness ; it is all matter-of-fact prose now."

"Why did you make poor Madeleine love the squire then? the village carpenter would have suited her much better; and then she and he, and that dear little sister Kitty, could all have lived in that pretty cottage under the chestnuts. Can't you alter the story, Queen?"

Queenie shook her head remorselessly. "It is a pity, but one can't alter these sort of things, Emmie. Poor Madeleine loved, and suffered, and lost, as other women have done since this world began; but she would not have been without her suffering for all that."

"I can't understand you," returned the child, with tears in her eyes. "It was such a beautiful story, quite your best, and now you have spoiled the ending."

"Life is full of these sad finishes," replied the young story-teller, oracularly; "there is a fate in such things, I believe. Don't be unhappy, darling, poor Madeleine would have been miserable in that cottage under the chestnuts; she

would much rather have lived in her attic with dear little Kitty, and watched the young squire riding by on his grey horse. Evening after evening, as they disappeared in the distance, she would think of the lovely young wife that awaited him. You may be sure that her heart was full of blessings for them both, even though she felt a little sad and lonely sometimes."

"But she would not have been quite happy, even with Kitty," persisted the child in a troubled tone; "and then poor little Kitty would have been so sorry."

What was there in the child's artless words that made Queenie suddenly flush and tremble?

"Hush, you must not say that; it is only a story we are telling, it is not true, any of it. No one is perfectly happy in this world; there are always wishes unfulfilled, unsatisfied longings, troubles everywhere."

"Yes, I know; but somehow it reminded me of you and me," interrupted Emmie, with a little sob. "If you were ever unhappy, Queen,—in that way I mean,—I think I should break my heart."

"Oh, hush, my darling!" snatching the thin

hands, and covering them with kisses, "it is only a story; you must not fret. Do you think Madeleine would have been wicked and made herself miserable, just because she loved the noblest man that ever lived? No, no, my pet; not when she had her own little sister to love and cherish."

"Do you always tell stories in the gloaming? that seems a very pretty one. I suppose I ought to apologize for being an uninvited auditor," observed Garth, as he quietly walked in and took possession of the hearth.

Emmie gave a little shriek of surprise as her sister hurriedly disengaged herself from her embrace.

"How long have you been standing there? Did you mean to startle us? You are very naughty; you have made Queenie look quite pale, and she had such a color the minute before."

"Have I startled you? that was very wrong of me," returned Garth, taking her hand.

Garth was speaking and looking in his usual way; but in reality he was taken aback by Queenie's evident agitation. She had always met

and greeted him brightly ; why had she grown so strangely pale at the sight of him this evening ? The brown eyes that had often haunted him had not yet been lifted to his face.

“ Have I startled you ? ” he persisted, still detaining her until she should answer him.

“ A little. I am sorry you should have heard all that foolish talk,” she stammered, growing suddenly hot over the remembrance, and not venturing to encounter his candid glance.

What had possessed her to concoct such a story ? Would he read the secret meaning ?

“ I must make the tea, the kettle has been singing for the last half-hour,” she observed hurriedly, glad of an excuse to move away and recover herself.

Garth did not ask any more troublesome questions ; he turned his attention to Emmie, taking possession of the rocking-chair, while the child took her little stool beside him.

Queenie left them to themselves for a long time. All sorts of preparations seemed needful before the meal was declared ready. The candles were still unlighted, and she made no attempt to

kindle them. Garth threw on another pine knot, and the warm ruddy light was soon diffused through the little room. As Queenie moved about, contriving endless errands for herself, she had no idea that Garth was furtively watching her.

“Why had she grown so pale? what was there in his sudden appearance to confuse her?” the young man was asking himself with a little throb of curious excitement. Somehow this unusual agitation on Queenie’s part soothed and tranquilized him; he began to think less bitterly of Dora; some subtle influence, half painful and half pleasurable, seemed to steep his senses.

Garth was quite unconscious why he wanted Queenie to look at him. He watched her graceful movements about the room with quiet satisfaction. Two days before his fancy had been taken by the soft whiteness of a dress that flowed smoothly and did not rustle, and by the shining of golden hair in the lamp-light; and now a black serge dress with snowy collars and cuffs charmed him with its nun-like simplicity.

What was there in these two women, so utterly

dissimilar, that fascinated him? As far as he knew he was not in love with either, although he had given the preference to Dora—Dora, who allured and yet repelled him, and for whom he now felt such bitterness of resentment.

"Why are you so quiet, Mr. Garth? no one has been telling you sad stories," cried Emmie, lifting her kitten on to his knee. "I wish you would speak to Queen, she always makes things end so badly."

"I am afraid your sister draws from life," he returned absently. He spoke without intention, but a shadow swept over Queenie's sensitive face.

"You ought not to have listened," she said reproachfully. "It was only some nonsense to please Emmie. I make up things, any rubbish pleases her; sometimes it is a fairy story, or some odd bits one picks out of books; nothing comes amiss," she went on, bent on defending herself.

"And you think a girl can make herself happy with an unrequited love preying on her?" he observed in a quizzical tone. "I don't know

what women would say to such heresy. I think Emmie was right, and that little Kitty would have a great deal to bear."

Queenie was silent.

"Confess that you don't believe such a thing could be possible."

"As what?" looking up at him with varying color.

"That a girl, that Madeleine, for example, could make herself comfortable under the circumstances."

"Did I say a word about comfort?" she returned with spirit. "Of course Madeleine thought her trouble a trouble, and never called it by any other name."

"And of course she made herself and little Kitty miserable?" he rejoined, enjoying the play of words, but watching her keenly all the time.

"She did nothing of the kind," flaring up with sudden heat. "You have not heard half my story, or you would not say such a thing."

"Suppose you enlighten me," with some railery in his tone. "Your heroine is not different

from the ordinary run of women ; and most of them make themselves miserable under the circumstances."

"Not women like my Madeleine," with a sudden lighting-up of earnestness in her face. "I don't think men are quite like that; they don't understand."

"What is it they don't understand?" he asked, somewhat puzzled.

"The blessedness of giving," she returned simply ; "the privilege of being able to see and love what is highest and best without hope or thought of return. Some women feel like that."

"But not many," he replied, touched by her earnestness, and conscious again of that strange thrill.

"No, not many," looking at him gravely. "The great number dread suffering, and fear to enter into the cloud. They let men spoil their lives, and then the disappointment hardens and embitters them; instead of which they ought to go on simply loving, and being sorry, but not too sorry, about things."

"But suppose the object is not worthy? You

know how often that is the case," he demanded gravely.

"Ah, that is the greatest pity of all. There is no trouble like that, to see the degradation of one we love; indeed, that must be terrible!"

"Ah, your golden rule of giving will not hold there!"

"Why not?" she asked quietly. "I heard a sad story once, when Emmie and I were at Granite Lodge. One of the governesses had had a dreadful trouble. She was engaged for some years to a man who professed a great affection for her, and suddenly the news of his marriage reached her."

"Well?"

"Well, she staggered under the blow, but she bore it somehow. It would have nearly killed some women. She just took up her life and did the best she could with it. 'I am keeping it all for him,' she said to me once, with such a mournful smile; 'when he wants it, it will be ready for him, but it will not be here.'"

"Keeping what?" asked Garth, somewhat absently.

"Why the love he had thrown away as worthless," she returned with kindling eyes. "Don't you think the faith of that poor German governess had something noble in it? She had forgotten her own wrongs and his fickleness. In the world to come it should be all right between them."

"Wasn't that rather far-fetched?"

"Not at all," returned the girl warmly; "those who have sympathy here must have sympathy there. There will be no broken lives in heaven."

"No; of course not," feeling himself a little out of his element, but strangely attracted by the eloquence of Queenie's eyes.

As for Queenie, she had almost forgotten to whom she was speaking. She was wrapped up, absorbed in her subject; all sorts of deep thoughts stirred within her.

These things were true to her, but she felt with a kind of wonder that he did not understand. Perhaps he felt with a young man's reverence the mystery of the world to come. Some men have a great dread of touching sacred things with unconsecrated hands; but Queenie's young eyes had the fearlessness of the eagle,

they looked unblenchingly up at the light. What was the use of separating things spiritual from things material in her creed? Love was the ladder that Jacob saw reaching from earth to heaven; evermore there were angels ascending and descending. The doctrine of the communion of saints had infinite readings.

“Those that have sympathy here have sympathy there,” she had asserted with entire faith and simplicity. Why did not he, why did not everybody, understand?

As for Garth, he felt a little moved and excited, stirred by her earnestness, yet not wholly comprehending it, and quite out of his element.

are caught at the rebound. She had no idea of the real state of the case, and that Garth's first thought in his mortification had been to seek solace in her friendship. She only knew that somehow Garth had been nicer, and she had done him good.

"What does it matter if one is disappointed here?" thought the young visionary in that first sweet gush of satisfaction, "that it is all giving and no return—at least, not the return that one wants? life will not last for ever. In that bright hereafter there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, the Bible tells us that. Nothing but love, which, after all, is another name for life. We are only hiding our treasures now, heaping them up in silence and darkness, like that poor Fraulein Heldrig. By-and-by, up there, those whom we love will call to us and stretch out their hands, and we shall come bearing our sheaves with us."

Queenie was weaving all manner of pure womanish fancies as Garth went back through the rain. The young man's pulses still throbbed with excitement. His sluggish imagination had

been quickened and stirred within him ; he felt with a curious, indefinable sensation that he had drifted long enough down the tide of circumstance, and that his fate approached a crisis. Would it be different to what he had planned all these years ?

And that night he thought less of Dora.

How inexplicable are the ways of mankind, even the best of them. Garth, with all his uprightness and integrity, failed to see that his conduct lay open to questioning when, after this evening, he began to haunt the cottage. He was only seeking solace and forgetfulness, a healing compensation for the hurt under which he still smarted at intervals ; but he had no idea that such self-indulgence might be fraught with peril to another's peace !

Queenie could not tell him if the intercourse between them were too pleasant to be perfectly harmless. The fault lay with him, not her. It was not for her to receive her benefactor coldly ; and then if she could do him good.

It was true Garth seldom came alone, either Cathy or Langley or Ted were with him ; but the

invitations to Church-Stile House became more frequent and pressing.

"Garth likes to see you and Emmie amongst us of an evening," Cathy said to her more than once. "You know what men are, my dear; they get tired of their sisters' company, and then Dora is away. I suppose that makes him so discontented and restless. Poor Florence is worse, and there is no possibility of Dora's return at present."

"So your brother informed me," returned Queenie demurely; but not to Cathy did she dare hint that Miss Cunningham's absence was a relief. She was somewhat afraid of questioning her own feelings too closely at this time. The incubus that had weighed upon her spirits was removed, at least temporarily. Life was passing pleasantly with her just now; she had work enough to occupy her; a pretty cottage where she and Emmie lived like disguised princesses, and friends whom she loved and trusted to brighten her leisure hours.

"Shall I ever be so happy again in my life?" she said once to Cathy. "I think this summer

is the sunniest I have ever known. When one is so thoroughly satisfied one dreads a change."

"I like change," returned Cathy, boldly. "I think a long lease of monotonous happiness would stupefy me. Life is not a mere table-land; there are mountains to ascend before one can see the view, broad rivers to cross, and long deserts to traverse; he is a poor traveller who fears either."

"You forget Emmie and I are already footsore with our rough pilgrimage," rejoined Queenie, with her bright quaintness. "We have been through the Slough of Despond and the Valley of Humiliation."

"And the other valley that was worse," put in Emmie, who was listening to them; "but you only stood at the entrance, Queen; it was I who had to fight with all the hobgoblins."

"Hush, my sweet. Yes, I know," hastily kissing her, for Queenie could never bear to be reminded even by a word of Emmie's past danger. "Well, we are in our land of Beulah now, the land flowing with milk and honey."

"It strikes me that you are very thankful for small mercies," observed Cathy, gruffly, who

could never feel quite reconciled to her friend's humble employment, and who was ready to quarrel with Dora for her patronage and condescension.

"Supposing we were one day to spread golden wings and fly away," rejoined Queenie, gaily. "Supposing some one were to leave us a fortune, and Emmie and I suddenly became grand people, would you like me better then, Cathy?"

"No; I should dislike to see you so spoiled," she returned, frowning at the idea. "I believe Garth and I have a monomania on that subject, we hate rich people so. I would not have you and Emmie a bit different; but, Queen," changing her manner and speaking rather nervously, "I can't help thinking that you are a little extravagant; Langley said so the other day."

"Extravagant!" repeated Queenie, opening her eyes wide.

"Yes; I think Garth put it into her head, for Langley never notices those sort of things. He found out that you had hired that piano from Carlisle, and then you are always ordering pretty things for Emmie. Garth has such a horror of

debt, and, as he said, two hundred a-year will not buy everything; and you have not got nearly that, have you, Queen?"

"I must be more careful," returned Queenie, evading the question. "I am very much obliged to your brother for the hint; but there will be no fear of my getting into debt, you may assure him of that. I have had a terror of that from a child, ever since I saw the misery it involved."

"I am thankful to hear you say so," returned her friend, much relieved.

She had been a little bewildered by Queenie's purchases. The *ménage* of the cottage had been perfectly simple, and, with the exception of that Gainsborough hat, Queenie had kept her own and Emmie's dress strictly within bounds. But the fifty-pound note had burned a hole in her pocket, and she had begged Caleb to forward some amusing books and games for the child's entertainment; and the expensive selection made had caused dismay to her friends at Church-Stile House when Emmie displayed her treasures.


Queenie laughed at her friend's lecture, but it caused her a little anxiety. What would they

think of her playful deception? would they consider themselves at all aggrieved at it? Garth too, with his horror of heiresses and his exaggerated notions of independence! She felt a little sinking of heart at the thought.

The autumn had set in cold and rainy, ceaseless down-pours still flooded the country; the field path to the Vicarage was impassable, and the lane almost a grey mire. Garth and Ted plodded past the cottage daily in their leathern gaiters, and Dr. Stewart shook his head ruefully when he encountered Queenie in his rounds.

"Why don't you give your scholars a holiday, such constant wettings are good for no one?" he asked; but Queenie only laughed, and drew her old grey waterproof closer round her. After Cathy's sermon she dared not invest in a new one. She looked so bright and good humored, there was such a fresh radiance about her, that Dr. Stewart failed to notice the shabbiness of the garment. He only carried away with him an impression of youthful brightness that lingered long with him.

"And Miss Faith used to look like that," he



thought a little bitterly, as he rode homeward in the darkness.

Dr. Stewart had by no means ceased his visits to the Evergreens. He still dropped in at odd times, and kept up a running fire of argument with Miss Charity, and still maintained a rigid surveillance of the books that lay on the table beside her. There was not much conversation between him and the younger sister; a hand shake and a brief word was often all that passed between them. His praises of Jean, and the merits and demerits of her housekeeping, were all retailed into Miss Hope's sympathizing ear; while to the somewhat grim Miss Prudence belonged the privilege of pouring out his tea and providing the crisp griddle cakes that his soul loved. Faith felt herself somewhat out in the cold; she was younger and more attractive, but she had not Charity's wit and cleverness; in spite of all those long hours of reading, she was often at a loss to comprehend the subject which they were discussing. She sat by a little silent and heavy-hearted over her work; it was not for her to speak if he had ceased caring to listen.

Faith was growing paler and more worn every day ; the renewal of her intercourse with Dr. Stewart had brought disappointment as well as pleasure with it. True, he had brightened her life in many ways, and his brief visit was the chief event of the day, but it often left behind it a strange restlessness and sadness. In a vague sort of way she began to understand that she had not fulfilled the promise of her younger days ; that he was disappointed in his ideal. The old Faith had been a brighter and more hopeful one ; and at this thought the sweet face grew more troubled and downcast.

“What’s to do with you, Faith ? you always seem in a maze about something when Dr. Stewart is here,” Miss Charity would say sharply, when their visitor had taken himself off with a curt nod that included the whole sisterhood. It was Miss Prudence who generally let him out now ; Faith did not offer to stir from her corner. How did she know whether he wanted her.

“It seems so strange that a woman of your age should find so little to say,” continued Miss

Charity, with a displeased jerk of her thin ringlets.

"He only talks to you, Cara; you neither of you seem to want me," returned poor Faith, with the least possible trace of bitterness in her tone.

She did not often retaliate, for hers was a quiet, peace-loving nature, but to-day she felt chafed even to soreness.

Never had her sister's yoke oppressed her so bitterly; never had those readings in that close hot room seemed so tedious. The novels had been replaced by biographies, all of Dr. Stewart's choice; but the pure English and the nobility of the lives delineated were lost upon Faith, chafing under a secret sense of injury, and longing to be alone with her burthen. How hard is enforced companionship, even to the most patient of us. Faith looked out wearily at the driving rain that kept her a prisoner, and deprived her of the one thing she most prized—a solitary walk.

But at night she had it out with her thoughts. She would lie awake for hours, covered round by the sacred darkness, thinking out the problem of her life.

Why had Dr. Stewart crossed her path again ? to what intent and purpose ? She had become resigned to her life in a weary sort of way, and that one bright summer had only lingered in her memory like a dream of good to be prized. True, it was her most precious possession, the one thing that redeemed her life from blankness ; but still time had in a great measure healed the wound of her disappointment.

But now they had met again as friends, who had once been something closer to each other. True, there had been no spoken understanding between them ; but there had been looks that had been as plain as words, half sentences that conveyed whole meanings, glances of mutual trust and sympathy. Was all this to go for nothing ? was he to be free, to put away the past, and forget and come again, while she alone had been faithful ?

Dr. Stewart took no apparent notice of her changed looks ; he came and went in his blunt way, and left her alone in her quiet corner. Sometimes his evenings were spent at Church-Stile House or the Vicarage ; now and then they

heard of him at the cottage, making one of a merry party, and welcomed warmly everywhere.

The day after Faith had uttered her little protest to her sister the weather showed signs of breaking. The rain had abated towards afternoon, but the low grey skies and wet roads were very uninviting. Faith looked out at the prospect a little disconsolately, it seemed to her an emblem of her own life, and then she turned to her sister.

"The rain has stopped, I think I shall go out now, Cara; it will do my head good."

"I thought Dr. Stewart was coming this afternoon," returned Miss Charity, clicking her knitting-needles busily as she spoke; "he promised to bring us more new books. You heard him say so yourself, Faith."

"Yes, I know; but he will not miss me; he has got you to talk to him, Cara, and I feel I must have a walk. I am sure he will understand," she returned deprecatingly.

"Well, if you like to be so ungracious it is not my business to interfere," retorted Miss Charity in a displeased tone. "If you are only going to sit in the corner and not open your

lips when he comes in, you may just as well be out. But he won't have a high opinion of your politeness."

"I cannot help that," returned Faith, wearily.

Another afternoon of needle-work and her sister's sharp speeches was not to be borne. She began to feel a dread of these visits, they made her so uncomfortable.

"Well, put on your waterproof, if you must go," snapped Miss Charity, aggravated at Faith's unwonted resolution. "The rain will only keep off for an hour, and you will get nicely soaked." And Faith meekly acquiesced.

The waterproof was not a becoming garment, it was almost as shabby as Queenie's; the shapeless folds quite disguised her neat figure. She had on her old brown hat too, that suited her less well than her little Quaker bonnets; but Faith knew she would have one of Charity's sharp lectures on extravagance if she got her nice bonnet ribbons soiled, for, with their modest expenditure, even bonnet ribbons had to be considered.

It was a severe shock to her womanly vanity

when, a little way down the road, she met Dr. Stewart. The grey waterproof might be considered fit raiment for such an uncertain afternoon, but the old brown hat! Faith smarted with mortified vanity down to her finger-ends.

He was on foot, as it happened, and he turned back and walked with her a little way, but he scanned the cloak and the hat rather quizzically as he did so.

"So you went out to avoid me, did you, Miss Faith," he said good-humoredly; but the sudden question grazed the truth so closely that Faith's pale cheeks flamed up in a moment.

"I have not been out for three days, and then my head has been so bad," she stammered. She was not asking for his sympathy, but she wished to defend herself from all charge of rudeness.

"Do you always suffer from these headaches?" he asked suddenly.

"No, not always; but they have been pretty bad lately," she returned indifferently. "I suppose the close room does it. Cara is so afraid of draughts, and so much reading does not suit me."

"I think the others ought to take their turn. I mean to tell Miss Charity so some day."

"Oh, no ; pray do not," in much distress. "It does not really hurt me, not much ; and Cara does so dislike Hope's reading, it is too loud and fast for an invalid."

"She must be taught to read slower then."

"Oh, no ; you must not say anything about it," imploringly. "I have nothing else to do but to wait upon Cara, it is right for me to do it ; and if it hurts me what does it matter ? We cannot live for our own pleasure," continued Faith, walking fast and nervously, but he checked her.

"Slower, please ; I had no idea you were such an energetic walker. I want to talk to you, not that you ever honor me with many words. I am not to be included in the list of your duties, eh ?" with a sidelong glance of mingled fun and earnestness.

"I am afraid you have thought me very rude," in a subdued voice.

"No ; I have only found you a little depressing. What's been the matter with you all this

time, Miss Faith? I am an old friend, and you might be frank with me."

"There is nothing the matter," she returned in much confusion, thereby burthening her conscience with a whole falsehood. But how could she hint to him the reason of her weariness?

Dr. Stewart pocketed the falsehood with perceptible distrust.

"You are growing thinner and more nervous every day and there is no cause for it? Do you expect me to believe that?" with an incredulous laugh. "I mean to put a stop to these pernicious readings, so look out for yourself, Miss Faith."

"Oh, you must not; indeed you must not, Dr. Stewart," she implored, with tears in her eyes. "It is Cara's one pleasure, and I cannot have it interfered with. You have no right to interfere," she continued, turning upon him with the fierceness of the dove.

Poor Miss Faith! she was trying to work herself up into anger against her friendly tormentor, but somehow the anger failed to come.

"Have I no right? are you sure of that?" he demanded gravely. "You know better than I,

Miss Faith ; you must question your own heart and memory on that point."

"What do you mean?" she asked, growing suddenly pale, but walking still faster; but he put out his hand and stopped her.

"What do I mean? Have you forgotten Carlisle? It is ten years ago, and we have both grown older since then; but I fancy we have neither of us forgotten. Do you like me as well as you did then, Miss Faith? Do you think you could make up your mind to exchange the Evergreens for Juniper Lodge?"

Faith gave a startled glance into his face, but what she saw there left her in no doubt of his meaning. It was as though an electric shock had passed through her. She had been accusing him in her own mind of fickleness and forgetfulness, and all the time he had meant this!

"I thought that it was you that did not care, that had forgotten," she gasped, not answering his very plain question in her first dizziness of surprise.

"Then you thought wrong," he returned coolly. "Women are not the only faithful beings

in creation, so you need not lay claim to that extra virtue. It was you who left me, remember that, Miss Faith."

"But you might have followed; you might have asked what had become of me," she faltered.

"What was the use?" was the uncompromising answer, "I had a mother and sister to maintain. A wife is too expensive a luxury for a poor man, and I was poor enough, in all conscience. Well, so it is settled, and we understand each other at last, Faith?"

"Yes, I suppose so," she returned, softly.

The wooing had been brief and matter-of-fact on Dr. Stewart's side; but apparently he was quite satisfied with the result, for he walked on in a brisk, contented sort of way.

Faith walked beside him, dizzy, and with her head throbbing with nervous pain. She had forgotten all about her old brown hat and her waterproof. The low, grey skies still foreboded rain, and the wet pools shone under her feet; but if a miracle had transformed them into rosy wine she would scarcely have been more

astonished. That he should have meant this all that time!

"And I thought you had forgotten, Dr. Stewart," she said presently, in the tone of one that craved forgiveness.

"Humph! you will find Angus more to your purpose," he returned, curtly. "How about Miss Charity and the readings now, Faith," with a merry twinkle.

"Cara! oh, what shall we do with her?" she exclaimed, clasping her hands in sudden despair. "It is I who have forgotten now. My poor Cara!"

"Leave Cara to me," was Dr. Stewart's only answer, as they turned their faces homeward.

CHAPTER III.

“ CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME.”

“ Beseech your Majesty,
Forbear sharp specches to her ; she’s a lady
So tender of rebukes, that words are strokes,
And strokes death to her.”—*Shakespeare*.

“ Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks,
Shall win my love.”—*Shakespeare*.

FAITH’s nervous trepidation returned in full force when they came in sight of the Evergreens. She cast a piteous glance at the bay-window and then at Dr. Stewart, which secretly moved him to inward laughter, though not a muscle of his face betrayed amusement.

“ There are no white slaves in England, leave Miss Charity to me,” he said again, and the masculine assurance of his voice gave her a delicious sense of security.

The quiet way, too, in which he relieved her

of her cloak in the hall, and bade her lay aside her hat, brought with it a strange new feeling of protection and care. There had been on his part no protestations, no vehement declaration of affection ; but for a matter-of-fact, middle-aged wooer, rather new to his duties, Dr. Stewart was doing remarkably well.

Miss Charity was alone when they entered. The other sisters were in the habit of indulging in an afternoon nap, which they enjoyed in strict seclusion ; but Miss Charity's bright eyes never closed till night, and not always then. The poor lady could have published many a volume of midnight meditations, when she and pain held their dreary converse together during those ten long years of suffering.

She looked up rather sharply over her knitting-needles as the two made their appearance. She was still put out at Faith's unusual manifestation of self-will, and an afternoon's lonely cogitations had not sweetened her acerbity.

"So you have come back at last, Faith," she remarked ironically ; "I hope you have enjoyed your wet walk. I wish you would cure Faith,

Dr. Stewart, of her absurd restlessness and love of wandering; she goes out in all weathers, and that is such a ridiculous thing in a woman of her age," finished Charity, who, in certain moods, was given to remind her sister that she would never see thirty-five again.

But the taunt was lost for the first time on Faith, for had she not received this afternoon a fresh lease of youth?

"What does it matter about age, we have had a beautiful walk," returned Faith, laughing a little nervously as she hung over the back of her sister's sofa so that her face was hidden. The conjunction, so sweet to newly-engaged people, had slipped out by mistake. Miss Charity looked up testily.

"Who do you mean by we? I wish you would speak plainly. Has the doctor joined you in your hunt after dripping hedges. If one does not learn common sense when one has turned thirty-five last March I don't suppose it will ever be learned," grumbled the invalid, who, with all her sharpness, had not an idea of the real state of the case.

Dr. Stewart's eyes began to twinkle wickedly ; he was enjoying the fun. Miss Charity's humors always amused him. He generally let her fret and fume to her heart's content without attempting to contradict her, but a glance at Faith's nervous face determined him to give her a "clincher," as he called it.

"Yes ; I met Faith, and we had a walk together," he commenced blandly, but Miss Charity began to bridle.

"You met my sister, Dr. Stewart. I suppose you did not mean—to say what you did," she was about to finish, but the doctor interrupted her cheerfully.

"Well, I call her Faith because we are old friends, and because we have settled our little matters between ourselves this afternoon. When two people have decided to become man and wife there is no further need for formality, eh, Miss Charity."

"Man and wife !" responded Miss Charity with a faint shriek, and then she covered her face with her hands.

"Yes ; have we startled you ?" he continued

more gravely, for her surprise and agitation were very great. "Faith was unprepared for my speaking, or she would have given you a hint. It seems we have cared for each other, in a sort of a way, for the last ten or eleven years; there's constancy for you! Why I have been all over the world, and have yet come back to my old sweetheart."

"Where are you, Faith? Why do you let Dr. Stewart do all the talking?" demanded Miss Charity, uncovering her pale face, but speaking in her old irritable manner. "If you have accepted him, and you are going to be what he said," shivering slightly, for the words brought back a dreary past and void of her own, "there is nothing for me or any one to say. You're not a girl," with an hysterical laugh; "I suppose you know your own mind."

"Oh, Cara!" cried poor Faith, with tears in her eyes, "I don't know how I can be so selfish as to wish to leave you, but it is all true that he says. It was coming back to nurse you that put a stop to everything ten years ago; and now he has come back, and it seems as though we were

meant for each other, and—and—" here she broke into nervous sobbing.

"Pooh, pooh," returned the doctor, but his eyes glistened a little in sympathy; "Juniper Lodge is only next door, you are not going to be separated. Come, Miss Charity, you are a kind soul, and have courage enough for ten Faiths, say something comforting to your sister, to give her a good heart over this."

Dr. Stewart knew how to treat Miss Charity. Underneath the sharpness and irritability there was the true metal of a good womanly nature, and a courage few women could boast. Years ago she had fought out her own battle, and had laid herself down on her bed of pain with a breaking heart but un murmuring lips. Had she ever forgotten poor George since the day she had given him up? had she ever believed the stories they had brought her of his unworthiness?

The small world of Hepshaw only saw in Miss Charity a little bright-eyed woman, with a caustic tongue and a temper soured by disappointment and suffering; but no one but Faith,

and perhaps Dr. Stewart, knew what the martyred body and nerves bore day and night.

"I feel sometimes like St. Lawrence on his gridiron ; I wish it were a bed of roses to me too," she said once grimly to her sister ; but not even to her did she speak of the slow agonies that consumed her. What would be the use, she thought ; pain is sent to be borne, not to be talked about.

Neither to Faith did she speak of the strange thoughts and dreams that haunted her nights. Sometimes, half lulled by opiates, it would seem to her as though the walls and roof of her chamber were thrown down ; through the room rushed the cold winds of heaven ; above her was the dark midnight sky seamed with glittering stars. How they wavered and shone ! Voices sounded through them sometimes. Grey and white shadows moved hither and thither, silent, but with grave, speaking eyes pitying and full of love. "Poor Charity !" they seemed to say, "still fastened to the cross and waiting for the angel of peace and rest. Will he be long ?" And the echo seemed to be caught

up and passed on shuddering : “ will he be long ? ”

Ah, yes ; those were her parents ! and poor George, how plainly she could see him ! He had died a drunkard's death they had told her, with a sorry attempt at comfort. He had ridden after a night's debauch, and his seat and hand had been unsteady ; but she had shaken her head incredulously. What mattered how he died ? he was at rest, she knew that, she was sure of it ; he could not have sinned as they said he had — her poor George, on whom she had brought such misery !

And now, because her cup was not yet full, this farther sacrifice was demanded of her. She must give up Faith, the patient nurse and companion of all these years of suffering. True, she was often cross and irritable, but could any one be to her what Faith was ? could any one replace that soft voice and gentle hand that had lulled and made bearable many an hour when the pain threatened to be intolerable ? would any other bear her harsh humors with such patience and loving resignation ? The thought of this new

deprivation paled the poor invalid's cheek and swelled in her throat as Dr. Stewart uttered his persuasive protest.

"Oh, Cara! I shall never have the heart to leave you when it comes to the point," cried Faith, clinging to her with fresh tears. What did it matter that they were middle-aged women, and that Cara's hair, at least, was streaked with grey, and that Dr. Stewart was regarding them with eyes that alternately twinkled and glistened. Had they not their feelings? was not Cara her own sister? "Oh, Cara! I never shall be able to leave you!"

"Nonsense," returned Miss Charity, pushing her away, but with tears in her eyes too. "Get up, Faith, do; what will Dr. Stewart think of us? Of course you must have him if you want him; and a good husband at your age is not to be despised, let me tell you that."

"But what will you do without me? and Hope reads so badly," sighed her sister.

Miss Charity winced a little over the idea, but she returned bravely,

“ Oh, I shall get along somehow ; Hope is not so bad if you put cotton wool in one ear ; and she always knows what she is reading,” with an accent of reproach to denote Faith’s wandering attention. “ There, there, it is all right,” patting her shoulder kindly. “ Juniper Lodge is not a hundred miles off, and I dare say Dr. Stewart will often spare you to us ; and all I have to say to him is, that a good sister will make a good wife, and that he will soon find out for himself ;” and with that Miss Charity composed herself to her knitting again, and shortly after that Dr. Stewart took his leave.

“ Must you go yet ? I hoped you would have waited and seen Hope and Prudence,” faltered Faith timidly, as she followed her lover into the little hall and watched him invest himself in his shaggy great coat ; but Dr. Stewart only smiled and shook his head.

“ Not to-night ; give my kind regards to them. To-morrow afternoon if it holds up we will have another walk together and discuss future arrangements. You will want this evening to get your thoughts in order, eh, Faith ?” with a look of

such thorough understanding and good-humor that her color rose.

"Miss Charity is enough for one afternoon, I could not quite stand the other cardinal virtues," he said to himself as he sat down contentedly to his solitary tea.

Jean, excellent woman, knowing his ways, had lighted the fire and brought down his slippers to warm. "I am not so badly off as a bachelor that I need be in such a hurry to change my state," he went on, stretching out his feet to the blaze; "but how is a man to enjoy comfort and the pleasure of a good conscience knowing that a human creature is dying by inches next door? and though that's rather strong, I do believe she gets thinner every day, with all that worry and reading nonsense. When she is my wife no one can interfere with her, and I can keep Miss Charity within bounds. Poor soul! one is bound to pity her too. I felt quite soft-hearted myself when Faith was kneeling there looking so pitiful. Well, she is a dear woman, and I don't repent of what I have done; for, in spite of Jean's excellent management, one

feels a trifle dull sometimes now the old mother's gone and Edie is married. By-the-bye, I must write and tell Edie about this, she will be so delighted."

Faith returned a little soberly to the parlor when Dr. Stewart had taken his departure. She would gladly have slipped away to her own room to dream over this wonderful thing that had happened, but she knew that would have been an offence in her sisters' eyes. There were Hope and Prudence to be enlightened, and a gauntlet of sisterly criticism to be run. Dr. Stewart was such a favorite with them all, that she knew that in whatever light they might regard her acceptance of his offer that it would not be unfavorable.

Miss Charity broke the ice herself in her usual trenchant fashion.

"A fine bit of news I've got for you two while you have been napping," she began, knitting in an excited manner. "Here's Faith, who is old enough to know better, has gone and made a match of it with Dr. Stewart."

"What!" ejaculated Miss Hope, and then she broke into one of her loud hearty laughs that

always jarred on the invalid's nerves. "Well done, Faith ; so you don't mean to be an old maid like the rest of us. Well, three in a family is enough to my mind, and plenty, and you never had quite the proper cut. So it is mistress of Juniper Lodge you mean to be ! Well, well, this is a rare piece of news to be sure ; nothing has happened in the family worth mentioning since Charity took up with poor George."

"Well, there will be one mouth less to feed," put in Prudence in her usual strong fashion ; "and with the present exorbitant price of meat that's something for which to be thankful."

But though the speech was not sympathetic Miss Prudence's lean brown hand trembled a little as she unlocked the tea-caddy and measured out the scanty modicum of tea. Poor Miss Prudence ! there was still a warm woman's heart beating under the harsh, unloving exterior, though it seldom found utterance. Her one object in life had been to eke out a narrow income, and bring down her own and her sisters' wants to the limits of penury. A small saving constituted her chief joy ; the low standard had dwarfed her moral

stature; petty cares had narrowed and contracted her; the mote in her eye hindered the incoming of heart sunshine, and made her life a hard, unlovely thing.

For it is a sad truth and a painful one to many of us, that in a great measure we form our own lives. The wide blanks, the vacuum that nature abhors, are all self-created. Outside the void, the chaos, the central abyss of self, there wait all manner of patient duties, joys, griefs, possible sufferings, a world of human beings to be loved, to replenish emptiness and the waste of spent passion.

Miss Prudence was one of those unhappy beings who read the meanings of life by the light of a farthing dip. Within her secret sanctuary the small god Economy dwelt as a favored deity. She would sweep her house like the woman in the parable for the smallest possible missing coin, and go to bed in despair for the loss of it; but she left her own inner chambers miserably unclean and full of dust and cobwebs.

And yet, as in many other persons, Miss Prudence's faults were only caricatures of virtues.

She was miserly, but it was for her sisters' sakes more than for her own. To keep the little house bright and respectable she toiled from morning till night; but I do not know that any of them loved her better for it. It was Prue's vocation, her one taste. If she could only have read to Miss Charity, and taken her share in the nursing, Faith would have been more grateful to her.

She fretted, as was natural, over that little speech of Miss Prudence's, for she was faint with excessive happiness, and thirsted for a pure draught of sisterly sympathy.

"Is that all you have to say to me, Prue?" she demanded in an injured tone.

"What have I got to say," returned poor Miss Prudence, looking greyer and grimmer, "except that it is a fine thing to be Dr. Stewart's wife and the mistress of Juniper Lodge, and not be obliged to count your pence till your eyes ache with trying to make out that five are equal to six? That's what I've been doing all my life, Faith, and no thanks to me either; and it does not always agree with one."

"There, there, take your tea, Faith," inter-

rupted Miss Charity, testily; "we've wasted more than an hour already over this business of yours, and we shall get through very little reading to-night."

"Nonsense, Charity; let Faith have her talk out," observed Hope, in her good-humored way. "We don't have weddings every day in the family, and it is hard if we don't make much of them when they come. Well, and is the day fixed, Faith?"

"No, indeed! What are you thinking about?" returned Faith, quite terrified at the idea.

She sat at the tea-table a little sad and confused as Miss Hope plied her with good-natured jokes and questions. Why did not Cara want her to talk? why was Prudence so snapping and hard? and why could they not all leave her alone with her thoughts?

"I think I will read now," she said, taking up the book and sinking with a sigh into her usual seat.

As the soft harmonious voice made itself heard Miss Charity's eyes filled with tears and her forehead contracted as though with pain. "And

she must lose this her one consolation," she thought. Faith's reading was to her as David's harp to the sick soul of Saul—it drove away the evil spirit of despondency. "It is giving the widow's mite—all I have," thought Miss Charity, with a little thrill of pathos.

As for Faith, she went through her allotted task with an outward semblance of patience and much inward rebellion, reading mechanically, without perceiving the drift of the sense. "And he meant this all the time," she said to herself. "Oh, how little I deserve him and my happiness."

Faith's evening, on the whole, had been disappointing, but before many hours were over she found that things were not to be arranged to her liking. The moment it came to a clashing of wills she soon discovered that Dr. Stewart's was to be paramount.

Faith had certain old-fashioned views on the subject of courtship and matrimony. The one must not be too brief or the other too sudden in her opinion. Dr. Stewart's views were in direct opposition.

"When a man gets on to middle age, and has knocked about the world as much as I have done," he said to her the following afternoon as they again plodded through the miry roads, only now a pale uncertain sunshine followed them, "he finds courtship just a trifle difficult. I am a plain man, and speak my mind plainly, Faith. We've known each other, or at least thought about each other, these ten years. We are neither of us young, and we are not likely to get younger; so if you're ready I'm more than willing, and we will just say the middle of November, and talk no more about it."

"But, Angus, that is only just six weeks!" faltered his *fiancée*.

"Yes, and that's a fortnight too much," he returned bluntly. "Shall we make it the end of October then?" at which alarming alternative Faith had only just strength to gasp out a faint negative, and subside into startled silence. After all, was not this exchanging one sort of tyranny for another?

She made known the news of her engagement to her friends at Church-Stile House in a shame-

faced manner that was quite new to her. Cathy fairly danced round her with delight, and even Langley's wan face brightened with sympathy.

"Dear Faith, I am so glad," she whispered. "Such constancy deserves its reward."

"A wedding at Hepshaw, and one of the cardinal virtues, of all people!" crowed Cathy. "What will the sisterhood do without you? in such a household, loss of Faith must be terrible," finished the girl solemnly.

"It is dreadful for Cara. I lay awake half the night thinking what she would do without me. It does not matter so much for Hope and Prudence; they will miss me, of course, but then they have each other; but Cara!"

"Oh, Miss Charity will do well enough!" returned Cathy in her off-hand manner. "You must not think of any one but Dr. Stewart now."

"Of course I think of him; he—Angus—is so good; oh, you don't know how good he is to me. But all the same, six weeks, and he will not hear of waiting any longer; and now he has talked Cara round to his opinion, and she says

the sooner the fuss is over the better!" finished Miss Faith, in a tone between crying and laughing.

Poor bewildered Faith! she had taken refuge with her kind friends at Church-Stile House to seek the sympathy that was not forthcoming at home. Langley's womanly intuition soon guessed the real state of the case—that Faith was half afraid and half proud of her lover's rough-and-ready wooing, and needed quiet and soothing. She dismissed Cathy and her overpowering liveliness as soon as possible, took off Faith's bonnet, put her in the easy-chair in her favorite corner, and petted and made much of her all the evening. Before many hours were over Faith had made her little confession, feeling sure that Langley would understand her. It was not that she was not happy, but she was just a little bit disappointed. Angus was very kind, just what he ought to be; but he seemed to take everything as understood, and that there was no need to say nice things to her. Why he had been far more lover-like ten years ago, when he had never said a word to her. "But all that he and Cara think

almost is to have it over quickly and without fuss. One ought not to call sacred things by that name," concluded Faith, with tears in her eyes.

"Dear Faith, men are so different to us!" returned her friend gently. "I quite understand how you feel; but then Dr. Stewart thinks he has given you an all-sufficient proof of his affection beyond any need of words. You are not going to marry a demonstrative man, you must remember that; but I don't doubt for one moment that he means to make you a happy woman."

"Things never come quite in the way one wants," replied Faith with a little sigh; but she felt more than half comforted by Langley's sympathy and wise common-sense? When Dr. Stewart came in to fetch her by-and-bye she had regained her old serenity of manner.

As for Dr. Stewart, after a few minutes' quiet observation of him Langley was quite satisfied to trust her friend's happiness in his keeping. There was a watchful tenderness in his bearing towards her, a quiet unobtrusiveness of attention, that spoke for itself without need of words. Faith

would soon find out for herself that she was warmly loved and cherished, though it might not occur to him to tell her so.

He gave Langley a hint too of his reasons for hurrying on the preparations for the wedding.

"She is almost worn out now, and the sooner some one takes care of her the better," he said, in his straight-forward, sensible way, when Faith had gone up-stairs to put on her bonnet. "She has been taking care of people the best part of her life, and now she wants rest and a little comfort. Miss Charity is a good woman, but she is awfully trying at times; but she will have to ask my leave before she tyrannizes over my wife."

"You have got a treasure, Dr. Stewart; you don't know how much we all think of Faith, and how dearly we love her. Garth says she is the best woman he knows."

"I always knew she was a good creature," returned Dr. Stewart in a provokingly matter-of-fact tone; but the gleam in his eyes contradicted it, and Langley understood him, and was satisfied.

The six weeks' courtship was soon over, but not until Faith was nearly harassed to death by the multiplicity of her labors. The slender resources of the sisters could only furnish a very modest outfit for the bride. The wedding silk of delicate fawn was Langley's gift, and the rich black silk and handsome seal-skin jacket, that were the glories of the whole, were anonymous presents directed to Faith Palmer in an unknown hand.

Faith believed that she was indebted for them to her lover's generosity, until he assured her very seriously that such an idea had never entered his head.

"No, no, Faith; I am not a poor man now, but I am not as rich as Croesus," he returned, shaking his head over the rich roll of silk.

"Why that must have cost seven-and-sixpence a yard if it cost a penny, and the seal-skin is worth eighteen or twenty guineas!" exclaimed Miss Prudence, eyeing Faith with profound astonishment not unmixed with respect. The future Mrs. Stewart was evidently a very different person to the oft-snubbed younger sister.

"How I do long to know who sent them!"

sighed Faith, bending over the parcels with a flushed face, which recalled the Faith of old to Dr. Stewart's eyes.

Queenie, who happened to be at the Evergreens, laughed over the fervency of the wish.

"What does it matter? the donor does not want to be thanked evidently. If I were you I should rather enjoy the mystery. People's thanks always seem like payment to me, they are delivered so punctually and with such effort."

"All the same, I should like to know who has taken such kind interest in me," returned Miss Faith, with a puzzled expression as she fingered the sealskin.

This anonymous wedding-gift was the only little bit of romance about the whole business. Faith sat and sewed with her sisters day after day, listening to long lectures on economy from Prudence, or read her allotted task to Charity. She did not dare to omit this duty even the day before the wedding. Dr. Stewart came in towards evening and found her pale and half hysterical over Carlyle's 'French Revolution.'

"I think we need one too," he muttered, as

he removed the book from her hand. “No more reading to-night, Miss Charity. What do you say to a game of chess with me?” and Faith gave him a grateful glance and darted from the room.

It was a simple, unpretending wedding. Faith looked very demure and sweet in her fawn-colored silk and pretty white bonnet. Dr. Stewart paid her the first compliment she had received from him.

“We shall have the old Faith back by-and-bye,” he said to her. “I mean to give you a week of sea breezes, and then we will settle down into regular Darby and Joan ways, shall we, my wife?”

And Faith blushed and said, “Yes.”

And it could not be denied that Mrs. Stewart was a far happier woman than Faith Palmer had been. Langley and Cathy were amused at the brisk, matronly airs that soon replaced the soft melancholy that had been Faith’s habitual manner. Angus was evidently perfection in his wife’s eyes; his opinions were the soundest, his views never to be controverted, or his word questioned.

"Are you happy, Faith?" Langley asked her very tenderly when they first met after her marriage.

"I am the happiest woman in the world; and Angus is everything that he can be," returned the mistress of Juniper Lodge. "Do you know, he won't hear of our neglecting Cara. I read to her every day for an hour, and he often goes in and plays a game of chess with her; and he has taught Hope besique and cribbage, and they play them together. Ah, you don't know how dear and thoughtful he is for them as well as for me!" finished Faith, with a look of infinite contentment.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM.

"A woman is more considerate in affairs of love than a man, because love is more the study and business of her life."—*Washington Irving.*

It was about this time that Garth began to feel very uncomfortable. Hitherto his quiet, well-assured life, with its eight-and-twenty years of healthful work and activity, its moderate aims and small ambitions, had been singularly free from conflict. Mental disturbance, the weariness of self-argument, the harass of stormy passions, had been wholly unknown to him. In his ordered existence the pains and penalties of a lover's martyrdom had not vexed him.

He was still angry with Dora, but his discomfort did not proceed wholly from his wrath; it lay rather in a concealed fear that he was mistaken in his own feelings.

After all, was it Dora that he wanted? Was the friendship between them sufficient to warrant the assumption that they would be happy together in a life-long union? Was not her lukewarmness, her procrastination, tolerably clear signs that she was, in reality, as heart-whole as he? Would it go hardly with either of them if that dust-shaking movement of his should be carried out?

There was no engagement; the tacit understanding between them did not even amount to a promise. Dora had rejected his first attempt to place things on a more satisfactory footing; in reality he was free as air. Why was her influence so strong over him then that he feared to break the yoke of his subservience, and so stood, as it were, on the comfortless borders of uncertainty, battling between two opinions?

Dora was still away at Brussels, but Mr. Cunningham had returned. From him Garth learnt that they had found the invalid in a far more precarious state than they had at first imagined. The fever had subsided, but had been followed by a serious attack on the lungs. It was impos-

sible for her sister to leave her ; and Mr. Cunningham feared that a winter in the south of France would be imperatively needed.

Dora wrote a short letter soon after to the same effect.

The sight of the well-known characters moved Garth to a certain impatience. Why had she written to him ? how did she know that his anger was not still hot against her ?

“ It is grievous to see dear Flo’s sufferings,” she wrote. “ She is such a patient creature, and does all she is told ; but at one time we hardly dared to hope that she would be spared to us. Poor papa was quite in despair ; and as for Beatrix, she has been no use at all, she quite upset us the first evening by the way she clung to us. It is sad to see a girl of her age so entirely without control. The doctor still looks very grave over darling Flo, and I fear we shall be condemned to a winter in the south of France ; in that case I shall send Beattie home to papa, for her crying and fretting only harass one. I dare say Langley will look after her a little for me.

“ I little thought I was saying good-bye to

you for such a long time. If you had known that, you would have been a little kinder, would you not ? But I must not think of that. I am afraid I think of you all a great deal too much ; the prospect of the long winter away from every one makes me dreadfully homesick. Write and tell me how dear papa looks, and how every one is, and all about yourself, and believe me always and ever your faithful friend,

“DORA.”

Garth's answer was very cool and matter-of-fact. It contained a full description of Miss Palmer's wedding, with lengthy messages to Beatrix and Florence, and a few formal words of condolence over her prolonged absence. “It must be such a bore to be exiled against one's will,” wrote Garth ; but he did not say one word about himself.

Dora heaved a little sigh of regret as she folded up the letter. “Poor fellow ! he is still very angry with me,” she thought to herself.

Garth took a long, solitary walk when he had finished his epistle ; it had taken him more than

an hour to compose, and yet it had hardly filled one sheet of note-paper. He was heavy with discomfort, and yet a feeling of triumph was uppermost. "She will see that I am not to be played with ; that I regard myself as free, and mean to keep my freedom," he said to himself, as he tramped through the country roads in the starlight.

It was the beginning of November, and there was a keen, frosty feeling in the air. The fields that bordered the road on either side looked black in the dim light ; the trees looked gaunt and grotesque, stretching out their unclothed limbs in the darkness ; the grey stone walls seemed dim and unsubstantial. Garth walked on with long, even strides. The cold air, the exercise, stirred his young blood, and drove away despondent fancies ; in their place came pleasurable images, faint, yet full of grace, making pulsation stronger within him.

When did the thought first occur to him ? When and where ? or was it a thought at all, or only a feeling or sentiment ? A novel sensation not to be described, and certainly not to be

analyzed, had taken possession of him the very night after his interview with Dora, when, sore and angry, he had betaken himself to the cottage.

It was strange how that picture of the two sisters haunted him. Sometimes, when he woke up in the middle of the night, he recalled it vividly: the child curled up on the rocking-chair, the girl kneeling on the rug with the plate of cakes in her hand, the firelight shining on her round, dimpled arms and flushed face, and then her paleness, and the startled brightness of her eyes when she turned to him.

Had Dora ever grown pale at the sight of him? had she ever moved his better nature by such sweet, strong words as those that greeted his ear that night?

"What is it that men do not understand?" he had asked her in his simple, straight-forward way.

"The blessedness of giving," she had answered him, without guile or hesitation, "the privilege of being able to see and love what is highest and best without hope or thought of return. Some women feel like that."

Good heavens ! could she—was it a bare possibility that she could be speaking of herself ? and though, a moment after, he repelled this thought with a blush of shame over the vanity of such a supposition, other words conspired to haunt him.

“Those that have sympathy here must have sympathy there,” she had gravely assured him, and her earnestness had moved him to excitement. What if this sympathy were between them two ; between him, Garth Clayton, and the young creature that he had befriended ?

“Dolt, fool, idiot ! that’s what I’ve been for my pains,” growled Garth between his teeth, as he struck at a young sapling with his stick ; “as though one could map and trace out one’s feeling and one’s life in that way. What is Dora to me after all compared to this girl, this stranger, whom I did not know six months ago ; and yet, like a blockhead, I must try to bind myself to her, and call her my Fate.” And then he softened and grew pitiful. “Poor Dora ! poor dear Dora !” he said, with a kindly memory of his old play-mate, and all his anger died out of him.

After all, there was a very true friendship

between them none the less that he did not deceive himself, and called it by its right name.

Garth meant to go home straight that night, like the good young man he was; but, somehow, before he was aware he had unlatched the little gate. Perhaps it was the sound of Langley's voice in the porch that determined him. Of course it was the duty of an affectionate brother to escort her home.

But Langley had only left her own warm fire-side to visit an ailing child in the village, and was carrying the report to the young school-mistress.

She still wore her Sister-of-mercy's grey cloak, as Cathy called it, which Queenie was half-coaxingly, half-playfully trying to unfasten. She started at Langley's surprised exclamation, and again that paleness was perceptible.

As for Garth, he flushed a little over the girl's evident surprise.

"I heard your voice, Langley, and so I followed you in," he said gravely, looking at her and not at Queenie. All at once he seemed embarrassed and ill-at-ease, his usual assurance had left him.

"Now you have come you must both stay," replied Queenie brightly; she had recovered from her momentary agitation. "Langley has brought me a very sad account of poor little Bessie. I must go down there the first thing in the morning."

"Where is Emmie?" asked Garth, looking longingly at the empty rocking-chair, but not daring to take possession.

Langley's cloak still hung round her in straight long folds, she stood quietly warming herself by the fire, looking down on the flame with a thoughtful, intent face.

"Emmie is tired and has gone to bed. Do you know," looking up at Garth rather sorrowfully, "that I am afraid that she is not as strong as she ought to be. I have been telling Langley so. I often find her lying on the rug in the twilight, and yet she will have it she is only tired."

"She is growing so fast; children are often languid at that age; you must not be over-anxious," he returned kindly.

"How can I help it? she is all I have," replied

the girl, turning from him to hide the tears in her eyes.

The kindness of his tone had brought them there. Garth looked after her wistfully, but he said no more.

"Come, Garth, it is late, and we must not stay," exclaimed Langley, rousing herself. She put her hand on his arm and drew him gently on without seeming to notice his reluctance.

Queenie stood in the porch and watched them till they were out of sight.

"How kind he is to-night—kinder than usual," she thought, as she fastened up the door and went in.

The brother and sister were somewhat silent as they walked up the lane; Langley was taking counsel with herself. When Garth entered his study she followed him, somewhat to his surprise.

"Are you very busy to - night?" she said, pausing by the table, on which lay several letters, Dora's amongst them.

"Not too busy to talk to you, if that is what you mean," returned Garth pleasantly.

If the truth must be known he would rather have had his study to himself to-night, but selfishness was not one of Garth's faults; perhaps Langley needed his advice, so he stirred up the fire, drew the easy-chair towards it, and then relieved his sister of her heavy cloak.

"We have none of us heard from Brussels but you," she observed absently, as she perused the envelope before her. "Garth, I hope you will not be vexed with me, but I think, as things are between you and Dora, that you ought not to go so much to the cottage."

Garth nearly dropped the poker. "Et tu, Brute!" he groaned. "Is that what you have to say to me to-night, Langley?" he asked in a constrained voice, and Langley knew the matter of her speech displeased him.

"You must not be hurt with me, my dear, if I say what I think," she returned, following him to the rug. "You are such a good, kind creature, that it would never occur to you that your kindness could hurt any one; but Miss Marriott's position amongst us is somewhat peculiar."

"I thought she was Cathy's friend," he responded, a little crossly.

"Yes ; and mine too, and yours, if you care to call her so. You are only a young man, Garth, though you are so steady and reliable, and she is young and very attractive, and temptation comes when we least expect it ; and a friendship is not always a safe and a wise thing ; and—and I have long wanted to speak about this, my dear," went on Langley in a motherly tone. True, Garth was only two years younger, but was she not older by years of suffering ? could any sister love him better than she ?

"There are some things that need not be discussed between us," he returned with a little dignity. "I am quite aware of Miss Marriott's position."

"Yes ; but a sister is such a safe confidante," she responded softly, not repelled by his loftiness. "You and I have always been such friends, Garth, and I cannot bear you to be so close. I know you would not do anything that is wrong ; but, as things are between you and Dora, I cannot but think these constant visits to the cot-

tage are a mistake. If you knew how long I have wanted to say this to you, ever since—" But here Langley hesitated; she dared not hint that her uneasiness was chiefly caused by Queenie herself.

With her warm affection and clear-sightedness she had arrived at the conviction that this constant intercourse was fraught with danger to the girl in whom they were so much interested. It was for her sake as well as Garth's that she was speaking now.

"Stop a moment, Langley," exclaimed her brother angrily. "You have twice made an observation; have I ever informed you that I was on the eve of an engagement with Dora?"

"I thought it was understood between you. I am quite sure Dora feels that she belongs to you," was the serious reply.

"Then I beg to differ from you; Miss Cunningham feels nothing of the sort," was the indignant retort. "As far as I know, and I suppose I am the best authority in the matter, things are at an end between us. It is quite true," flushing at the remembrance, "that when I last went to the Vicarage that I tried to put

matters on a different footing. I had made up my mind that I owed Dora a duty, and I thought then that I wished this thing; but it appears I made a mistake. Miss Cunningham," somewhat bitterly, "had no intention of meeting my views."

"Garth, surely you are mistaken!" exclaimed his sister, much startled.

"I am not mistaken, Langley," in an offended voice. "Miss Cunningham is neither ready nor willing to enter into any engagement, she made that perfectly clear to me. She puts her father and sisters first, and me last; but she will see that I am not one to be trifled with."

"Do you mean to tell me that Dora refused you?" was the incredulous question.

"Not exactly; at least she would not let it come to that point between us, but she made her meaning tolerably clear. I am to go on in this way until she pleases to consider herself unfettered; but I have waited long enough."

"Did you tell her so?"

"Yes; I said that there must be no more backwardness on her part, no pretence of insuper-

able obstacles where none existed ; that it must be yea, yea, or nay, nay, between us ; that, in point of fact, she must have me or lose me."

"Did you say all this?"

"Yes ; but not in so many words."

"I think she has treated you badly, and deserved to be frightened ; there are no very real obstacles, as you say. Beatrix is a dear good girl, and will soon be old enough to look after her father and the parish. I always knew Dora's chief fault was a too great love of power."

"I shall be sorry to interfere with her prerogative as mistress of Crossgill Vicarage," he returned coldly.

"Now, Garth, that is hardly fair," rejoined his sister, smiling affectionately in his face. "Dora has behaved very badly, but she has not sinned past forgiveness ; she has never cared for any one but you all her life. I think that ought to soften your resentment."

"I dare say we shall always be good friends," was the indifferent reply.

"The very best of friends. Why this is sheer nonsense, Garth ; Dora would be miserable if she

knew how she had hurt you. Take my advice, dear; sit down and write to her, she is lonely and unhappy, and full of anxiety about her sister. Tell her that you are serious in what you said to her; that you are not patient, and do not mean to be; that she must make up her mind to give you a decided answer, and see what she says. Do you think she would run the risk of losing you altogether?"

"It does not matter, I shall not give her the chance of refusing me again," he returned gloomily. "Thank you for your advice, Langley, but it has come too late; I have made up my mind that Dora and I will be better friends apart."

"You have made up your mind after all these years," she said slowly and regretfully. "Poor Dora! whom we all loved for your sake, and who is so good and faithful a sister and daughter, so thoroughly trustworthy and intrinsic! Oh, no, Garth, you could not be so fickle!"

"You speak as though I have been in love with her all these years," returned Garth sullenly. "You know very well, Langley, I have been perfectly heart-whole all the time. True, I always

believed that we should come together, but it is not my fault if my inclinations no longer point that way."

"Ah!" Langley uttered no more than that little monosyllable, but the blood rushed to her brother's face; she knew now what he meant. "Poor Dora!" she sighed, and then she put up her face and kissed him, and said good night.

She had come to speak to him about Dora, not of the other one; that was none of her business. As far as she knew, his choice was not an unwise one; no one could know Queenie and not love her. She had grown into all their hearts strangely; but the old friend of their childhood, Dora!

She went away very sadly after that. Garth made no effort to detain her. His purposes were not yet ripe enough for confidence; he was a little shy of whispering them even to himself.

"You are not hurt with me because I ventured to say this to you?" she asked him, as she was about to move away.

"No; I think I am relieved; it is always best

to undeceive people," was his sole reply, and then she left him.

Garth enjoyed his solitude uninterruptedly after that, but he was not quite at ease in his own conscience. Langley's words, few and temperate as they were, had troubled him. It seemed so strange to hear her pleading Dora's cause, the very girl whom all these years he had intended to make his wife.

Should he give her this one chance more? should he write such a letter that its very sternness should constrain her to answer him? but no, she might repent and fling herself into his arms, and now his heart had gone from her.

"It is well to be off with the old love before one is on with the new," thought Garth, somewhat ruefully, but it was very clear that it was not Dora now that he wanted. "We are better apart; she will get to see that in time herself," he said, as Langley's earnest pleading rose uncomfortably to his mind. "I don't believe she is a bit in love with me." And before he retired that night he made up his mind that things must take their chance. He would wait a little perhaps,

there was no hurry. When the time for his wooing should come he would carry it in far different fashion than he had done, and the girl he should woo would not be Dora.

CHAPTER V.

CHANGES AND CHANCES.

“ One half our cares and woes
Exist but in our thoughts;
And lightly fall the rest on those
Who with them wrestle not.
The feather scarcely feels the gale
Which bursts the seaman's strongest sail.”

C. Wesley.

THINGS went on tranquilly for the next few days. Garth looked a little shame-faced when he next saw his sister, but he knew her too well to fear that an unready confidence would be solicited. Langley never asked to know people's secrets. If they reposed them in her they found her trustworthy and sympathizing. She had eased her conscience by warning her brother, and now her duty was discharged her heart was full of forebodings for their old friend Dora; and a

feeling that was almost akin to disappointment troubled her when she thought of Garth's changed fealty. "*Toujours fidele*" had been her motto for him as well as for herself, and yet, of the two girls her heart clave more to Queenie. Garth had no intention of reposing confidence in any one. He hid his feelings as well as he could, assuming at times an uneasy gravity that did not belong to him; but the usual symptoms were not lacking. He became enamored of his own company, addicted to solitary walks and an over-much use of meditation, was somewhat absent and desultory in his conversation, and haunted the lane with his cigar at all manner of unseemly hours. Queenie was not unmindful of this change in Garth. It may be doubted whether women are ever entirely unconscious of even a hidden passion; trifles are significant in such cases. A certain subtle change in Garth's tone, a hesitation, nay, a reluctance in speaking her name, a swift unguarded look, brought a sweet conviction to her mind: Dora must be forgotten. A rosy flush of hope, bright as her own youth, dawned slowly upon her.

Queenie was sitting alone one evening, late in November, thinking over these things. It struck her with a little surprise that she had not seen her friends at Church-Stile House for two days; such a thing had never happened before. She and Emmie had spent the previous evening at Juniper Lodge; Cathy had been expected and had not made her appearance, and she had also omitted her usual afternoon visit at the cottage. A fleeting glimpse of Garth as he drove by in his dog-cart was all that was vouchsafed her. Even Langley had been invisible. "If it were not so late I would run up the lane and see what has become of them," thought Queenie, with a slight feeling of uneasiness.

It was followed by a sensation of relief as the little gate unlatched and footsteps came up the gravel walk; but it was only Miss Cosie, with her grey shawl pinned over her curls, and a voluminous mass of soft knitting in her hand.

"Dear Miss Cosie, to think of your coming out such a bitter night! and I thought it was Cathy," exclaimed Queenie, pouncing on the little woman with vehement hospitality, and

depositing her, smiling and breathless, on an easy-chair.

“There now, my dear, it was all Christopher’s thought, at least he put it into my head,” began Miss Cosie, in her purring voice. “There I was going on, purl two, knit two together, knit plain, and so on, and nothing but the wrong stitches coming uppermost; and Christopher, poor fellow, couldn’t stand it any longer. ‘What’s to do with you to-night, Charlotte,’ he says. ‘I think the work has got into your head; hadn’t you better leave it for Miss Marriott to put right?’ for I just fussed him, you see, counting out loud and never getting any farther.”

“Do you mean that you could not get on with the new pattern I was teaching you the other night?”

“Well, my memory’s treacherous, that’s what it is,” returned Miss Cosie, placidly regarding the pink and white tangle that Queenie was rectifying. “‘Charlotte, my love, your head is just a sieve, and your fingers are all thumbs,’ as my poor dear mother used to say when I took my work to her. Dear, dear, I can hear her say it

now ; but wasn't it clever of Christopher to pop the idea into my mind. 'I will just run across to her, Kit my dear,' I replied, as pleased as possible, and he gave quite a comfortable sigh of relief."

"Poor Mr. Logan!" laughed Queenie. "You must learn to count to yourself, Miss Cosie; knit one and purl two is not a very pleasant running accompaniment to the leading article."

"Bless you, dearie, Christopher was not reading!" responded the little woman with a sigh, "he was just staring at the fire and groaning to himself in a quiet way. Though he has said very little about it he feels it terribly; he was as pale as a man could look when he came home and told me last night. 'I feel it as much as though it had happened to myself, Charlotte,' he said; and I believe, poor fellow, he meant it."

"Dear Miss Cosie! what can you be talking about?" asked Queenie in a perplexed voice. "Is there any trouble in Hepshaw with which I am unacquainted?"

"There, there, you don't mean to say they have not told you?" replied Miss Cosie in an

awe-stricken whisper, "and such friends as you are, too. Ill news fly apace, they say. Well, the righteous are taken away from the evil to come. His poor mother would have fretted her heart out to see him look as he does to-night, poor dear! and not a wink of sleep and scarce a mouthful of food since he first heard it, and that was yesterday morning, so Christopher says."

"Dear Miss Cosie! won't you please tell me what you mean?" begged Queenie beseechingly.

Miss Cosie was apt to become incoherent and rambling under any strong emotion, it would never do to hurry her into an explanation; but, all the same, these vague hints were filling her with dismay.

"I have not heard of anything: is—is there any trouble at Church-Stile House?" faltered the girl, growing a little pale over her words.

"Dear, dear! who would have thought of such a thing? what could Catherine have been thinking of?" cried Miss Cosie, patting her curls nervously. "Never mind, there, don't distress yourself, for there's good come out of every kind of evil, so Christopher tells us; and very beautiful

his sermons are, my dear, and very comforting to sick souls ; and it showed great want of faith in me to burst out crying as I did. ' Don't tell me that that poor young fellow has lost all his money, Kit, my dear ! ' I said, ' for it breaks my heart to think of such a thing ; ' and Christopher said—"

" Well, what did Mr. Logan say ? " asked Queenie as calmly as she could, while Miss Cosie wiped her eyes.

There was not an atom of color in her face. Could it be Garth of whom she was speaking ?

" Christopher said," responded the little woman in a trembling voice, "' I am afraid it is all true. Charlotte,' he said, ' there has been a run on the Bank, and things look as bad as they can look ; and I shouldn't be surprised if that poor fellow has lost every shilling he has invested.' That's what Kit said, my dear, and a great deal more that I did not take in."

" Is it Mr. Clayton of whom you are speaking ? " persisted Queenie, in a set voice.

" Yes ; that poor boy Garth. He and Christopher have been together all day looking into

things. Christopher says he is as cool and quiet as possible, for all his haggard looks, only they can't get him to touch his food ; and when a fine young man like that won't eat, it shows things have gone badly with him, as Christopher says."

"I must go and see Langley," exclaimed the girl, starting up. "Dear Miss Cosie, please don't think me rude ; but I cannot stay away from them now I know they are in trouble ! It is not so very late, is it ? but I could not sleep if I did not see them to-night."

"No, no ; of course not, my dear. I should have felt the same in your case," replied Miss Cosie placidly. She always agreed with every one, and would break off contentedly in an engrossing conversation at the slightest hint of weariness. "If you have set my work right I will just go back to Christopher, for he is very down, poor dear, over all this, and will no more take his supper without me than a baby would cut up its own food. There, there, my dear, I won't keep you," as Queenie hovered near her in feverish impatience ; and the girl accepted her dismissal thankfully.

She ran up the lane, regardless of the rain that beat down on her uncovered head. Her glossy hair was quite wet when she entered the warm room where Langley and Cathy were sitting together. Contrary to their usual custom, the sisters were quite unoccupied: Langley was lying back, as though wearied out, in her basket-chair; Cathy was sitting on the rug staring into the fire. Both of them looked up with an exclamation of surprise when they saw Queenie.

"So late, and in this rain!" cried Langley, affectionately passing her hand over the girl's wet hair as she spoke.

"What does it matter?—the rain I mean. I have only just heard; Miss Cosie has told me. Do you think I could sleep until I heard more? and Cathy has not been near me!" with a reproachful glance at her friend.

"You must not blame Cathy; she wanted to come to you to-night, only Garth and I would not let her. One ought not to be in a hurry to tell bad news; to-morrow would have been soon enough," replied Langley in her tired, soft voice.

"Did not Mr. Clayton—did not your brother

wish me to know?" stammered Queenie, somewhat nervously. Had she intruded herself where she was not wanted? would they think her officious, interfering?

Langley's calmness was baffling. Cathy, indeed, looked as if she had been crying, but she kept her face averted and did not speak.

"I will go back if I am not wanted, if I am not to know," faltered the girl, growing red and confused.

"Nonsense, Queen! as though the whole world won't know it by to-morrow!" exclaimed Cathy sharply. "Do you think it is a secret when people are ruined?"

"Oh, it is not as bad as that!" shrinking at the idea. "Miss Cosie was so vague; she said he had lost money, that something had happened to the Bank; you know her way. It was impossible to understand; and then I said I must go to Langley."

"Things are as bad as they can be," replied Langley sorrowfully, while Cathy shivered a little, and drew closer to the fire. "The shock has been so bad for Garth; nothing could have

been more sudden and unexpected. We were all as cheerful as possible yesterday morning, and then the letter came from Garth's solicitor; and when Garth went over to A—— to investigate the matter, it was all too true. There had been a panic, and run on the local Bank; the thoroughfare was quite blocked up with people, farmers and tradespeople, wanting to draw out their money. Of course, with such a run there was only one result, the Bank broke, and all Garth's hard-earned savings are lost. It was between two and three thousand pounds that he had invested; not much of a fortune to some people, but a large sum for so young a man to put by. The worst is," continued Langley, sighing, "that Garth will blame himself for what has happened. Mr. Logan has always advised him to bank with a London House, and he had made up his mind to do so; but for some reason he has delayed the transfer of the money, and now it is too late; and he will have it that his procrastination has ruined us."

Queenie pondered a little over Langley's account, and then her face brightened.

“It is sad, very sad, of course, to lose so much money, but it is not absolute ruin ; there is the quarry, your brother has still got that.”

“But Garth only rents it. You see there is the rent to pay, and a royalty besides, and all the workmen’s wages ; and just now there is a dearth of orders, and the men are asking higher pay. And now all Garth’s ready money is gone, and there is no one rich enough in Hepshaw to advance him the few hundreds that are necessary to carry on the works. We are trying to make the best of it, Cathy and I, for poor Ted is so utterly hopeless ; but we do not see what is to be done.”

“Is there no one who could help you ?” demanded Queenie in a low voice, but Cathy struck in impatiently.

“Do you think money is to be picked up in Hepshaw for the asking ? there is not a friend we possess who could advance the loan, even if Garth would accept it. Captain Fawcett has only his pension and a small annuity, and Mr. Logan is as poor as a church-mouse, though I believe both he and Miss Cosie have expectations from some old aunt or other, who objects to die.

We have not a relation in the world ; never were there such distressed orphans," continued Cathy, in a droll, disconsolate voice, that at another time would have made Queenie laugh.

"Cathy is right ; I do not see who is to advance us the loan," added her sister dejectedly. "We do not quite understand the details, but Ted assures us that it is absolutely necessary that two or three hundred pounds should be forthcoming in the course of a week or two, or Garth will be compelled to throw up the whole concern."

"Yes," broke in Cathy ; "and when Ted said that Garth turned round upon him quite angrily, and asked how he was to lay himself under such heavy obligations that he would never be able to repay. Then they had almost a quarrel over it. Poor Garth was so sore and unhappy ; he says he has never owed a penny in his life to any man."

"How large a sum do you think would clear him ?" asked Queenie casually, but two feverish spots burnt in her cheek.

"Ted said about six or seven hundred was

required to put them on their feet again. There are some workmen's cottages Garth has been building, and the architect's bill is not paid. We have only Ted's word to rely on, for we cannot get Garth to open his lips to us. He just says in a resigned, hard sort of voice, that it is all up with us, and he and Ted must take situations; and then he looks at Langley and me and goes out of the room."

"His work is the best part of his life; he is so proud of his position," put in Langley. "Garth's nature is so proud and independent; he is so accustomed to be master of all his actions that he would feel dreadfully at being placed in a subordinate position."

"Why will you aggravate me by saying such dreadful things," interrupted Cathy stormily, but the tears sprang to her eyes. "I won't think of Warstdale without Garth. Why it would break his heart to give up the quarry."

"Some one must lend him the money just to go on," observed Queenie in a low voice. "Surely there must be some friend who will assist him in this matter."

"We do not know where such a friend is to be found," returned Cathy. "One thing, I am determined to begin my hospital work without delay, and if things come to their worst Langley must go out as a companion. It seems hard breaking up the dear old home that we have lived in all our lives. Ted says if it ever comes to that Garth will never hold up his head again."

"Ted seems a Job's comforter," returned Queenie, but her eyes overflowed with sympathy, for the girl's voice was very sad. "My poor dears, what am I to say to you, it is all so sudden and dreadful?"

"Ah, that it is."

"I don't see that it makes it any better to talk about it," interrupted Cathy, springing up in a fit of nervous impatience. "We are only making Queenie miserable, and it does no one any good. I am going to see if I cannot coax Garth to eat some supper. I shall tell him that it won't benefit the rest of the family for one member to starve himself."

"Poor Cathy! she feels this terribly," sighed

Langley, as the door closed on her, "but she will not let Garth see how much she takes it to heart. If it were not for Cathy and Ted I think I could bear this better, but it does seem so hard if we cannot keep the home for them."

"Langley, don't you think Mr. Chester could help your brother?"

Queenie was almost sorry that she spoke so abruptly when she saw how the worn face flushed at the question. The suggestion was evidently a painful one.

"Hush! if you knew how I have dreaded some one proposing this! but Garth will not, he respects me too much for that. Harry is very often embarrassed himself. Gertrude is so extravagant, and then there are such heavy doctor's bills; but if he knew of our difficulty I am sure he would sell his land rather than not help us. Oh, Queenie," and here Langley's voice grew thin and husky with emotion, "promise me that you will not hint at such a thing to any one."

"Dear Langley, of course I will promise, if

you wish it," shocked at the agitation she had caused.

"Yes ; and you will go home now, and sleep quietly," folding the girl's hand between her own. "You must not take our troubles too much to heart. As Cathy says, that will do no one any good ; perhaps in a few days we may see our way a little clearer."

"I will go, if you wish it," replied Queenie gently. And indeed what more could she find to say to this patient creature who was looking at her with such tired eyes. "Dear, dear Langley, if you only knew how sorry I am for you all !" she said, kissing her, and then she went away.

But she was not able to leave the house unobserved ; the door of Garth's study was open as she passed. As he caught sight of her, he came forward slowly and, as it seemed to Queenie, a little reluctantly.

"I did not know you were here ; what brings you out so late ?" he asked with a little surprise, and then he mechanically stretched out his hand and took down his felt hat to accompany her down the lane.

"There is no need for that, it is not so very late," returned Queenie hurriedly. "I only came to see Langley, and—and because I heard there was some trouble."

Queenie hardly knew what she was saying in her confusion and nervousness; now they were face to face what could she find to say to him.

"All the same, that need not prevent my walking with you," he returned quietly. He spoke in his ordinary manner, but Queenie noticed that his face was very pale and his eyes had dark lines under them; he had avoided looking at her too, and his hand when it touched hers had been cold and shook a little. "It has left off raining, and the stars are coming out overhead, so there is no fear of your getting wet."

"I am not afraid of getting wet," she replied with a little nervous laugh. When they were outside the gate he slackened his steps a little.

"So they have told you about everything?" he said in rather a forced tone.

"Yes; they have told me everything," she returned simply, "and, Mr. Clayton, I do not know

what to say, except that I am more sorry than I can tell you."

"I always knew we might count on your sympathy."

"It seems such a dreadful thing to have happened, so utterly unexpected."

"You may well say that. If an earthquake had yawned under my feet it could not have been a greater shock. I thought myself so safe, in such absolute security, and now my foolhardiness has gone near to ruin us."

"Ah, you must not say that."

"Why must I not say it? A man must call himself names and speak badly of himself if he has proved himself an utter fool. Have I not been a fool to procrastinate in the way I have done, and to neglect the advice given me?"

"No; you ought not to be so hard on yourself. You have worked all these years, and all your hard-earned savings are lost; every one must pity you for such a misfortune, there is no room for blame, none."

"Ah, if I could only believe that. Do you

know, my remorse for my carelessness has been such that I have scarcely eaten or slept since the news came. I cannot forgive myself for bringing all this trouble upon them."

"Hush! this is worse than wrong; it is utterly morbid and wicked. Do not the wisest men in the world make mistakes sometimes? Could you know that the Bank was unsafe, and that there would be this run on it?"

"But all the same, I am reaping the fruits of my imprudence," he returned, but his tone was a little less gloomy.

The knowledge of this girl's sympathy was very precious to him. A little comfort dawned on him in his misery.

"It makes things so much worse when we blame ourselves," she went on. "It seems to me you want all your strength for actual endurance, from what Langley tells me. Your difficulties are very great."

"I am ruined," he returned in a choked voice. And then in a few brief sentences he recapitulated much that his sisters had told her, the absolute need of ready money for the architect's and

builder's account, as well as for the rent and workmen's wages.

"Things have never been at such a low ebb with us before. We have executed fewer orders this year than any previous years. I had no business to speculate on those cottages. I don't see how matters are to go on at all. In a few weeks' time you will see my name on the bankruptcy list, and then there will be nothing but for Ted and me to look out for situations."

"Oh, Mr. Clayton, I cannot bear to hear you talk so; something must turn up, some help must come," repeated the girl, earnestly.

Her face was flushed in the darkness, and her eyes full of tears, but he could not see that; perhaps he detected it in her tone, for his changed instantly.

"But I have no right to bother you with all this wretched business, or to keep you out here in the cold," for they were standing now by the little gate. "Good night, Miss Marriott. I know you are sorry for us, but we must not burthen other people with our troubles."

"But I like to be burthened. You must not



treat me as a stranger," she replied, putting her hand in his. "If I do not say much about all this it is because I am so very sorry, and I do not know how to comfort you ; but, all the same, I believe something will turn up."

"Let us hope so," he returned, with a pretence at cheerfulness, and then he left her and went back to the house.

He had made no unmanly moan over his misfortunes, but his heart was sick within him as he thought of the future. He had lost his money and perhaps his home, and must he lose this sweet new hope that had come to him ? If he were a poor man could he ever dare to trammel himself with a wife ? and the thought of shutting out this new-found happiness was very bitter to him.

"There is enough to bear without thinking of that to-night," he said to himself, with a sort of shudder, as he shut himself up in his solitary room ; but, all the same, Queenie's soft words haunted him with strange persistence.

He would have marvelled greatly if he could

have heard what she whispered as he left her.

“Oh, how ungrateful I have been, how utterly foolish. I can thank heaven now that I have five thousand a-year.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO CONSPIRATORS.

“ ‘Now look you!’ said my brother, ‘you may talk
Till weary of the talk.’ I answer, ‘Ay,
There’s reason in your words ; and you may talk
Till I go on to say, This should be so.’ ”

Jean Ingelow.

“THANK heaven, I have five thousand a-year,” repeated Queenie, as she drew the rocking-chair to the hearth and sat down by her solitary fire-side. “For the first time I am really glad in my heart to be rich.”

Any unseen spectator would have marvelled what thoughts possessed this girl. Queenie’s brow was knitted as though with perplexity, and yet a radiant smile hovered round her lips.

“It is difficult, far more difficult than I thought it at first,” she soliloquized. “There is a complication that prevents me seeing my way

clear, but if I sit here until morning I will find out what is the right thing to be done.

"I wonder what Langley must have thought of me," she went on. "I must have seemed so cold and unsympathizing. How could they know what kept me so silent? Why, it needed all my strength of mind to refrain from crying out, 'I am rich; I can give you all, and more than you want, if you love me; let me share some of my good things with you.' I wanted to fall on her neck and say some such words as these; but second thoughts are the best, and I knew I must be prudent.

"And then when he talked to me my secret seemed to choke me then. Oh, how my cheeks burnt in the darkness! how I longed to say to him, 'Do not be unhappy; there is no cause for despair. I have more than I know how to spend; let me be your creditor and advance you the sum you need. What are a few hundreds to me who have five thousand a-year? Let me prove my friendship for you and yours by rendering you this trifling service.' That is what I should have liked to have done, but I knew him too

well. Would he have taken it from me? Alas, no! He would have turned round with that high manner of his and upbraided me for my foolish mystery. In spite of his wretchedness he would have taken me to task, and put things in such a light that he would have made me ashamed of myself, and then he would quietly refuse my offer. Would he accept this thing from the girl who a few months back was a stranger to him? No; a thousand times, no; but his embarrassment and discomfort would make him suspicious. He would be vexed with me for my silence, mortified by my importunity, and in his trouble I should be less to him than I am now."

Queenie's secret predilection for Garth Clayton was making her timid. It had come to this, that nothing on earth could have induced her to offer him this money; she would have been as shame-faced and tongue-tied in his presence as a child just discovered in a fault. The silent understanding that was between them was too vague and unsatisfactory a basis for her to presume on; the word that was to give her the right and

privilege of spoken sympathy had not yet been uttered, might never be. Mahomet's bridge is not more slender than this vague connection between two hearts that beat in sympathy and yet are asunder. Over the sacred abyss of silence hangs the invisible chain ; it is strong enough to bear myriads of heavenly visitants, but only the eye of the faithful may discern it. To how many remain only the void and the mystery !

When a sensible person makes a mistake they are almost sure to repent it at some time or other. Queenie, who was as healthy-minded and straightforward as any pious, well-conducted young person could be, had yet fallen into the error of supposing that she might deviate into a by-path of romance and unreality without causing any great disturbance in her little world, while, in point of fact, she was only raising difficulties for herself. If she had gone to Garth Clayton and acknowledged the truth with all the eloquence of which she had been capable he would have been charmed with her *naïveté* and frankness, and treated the whole matter as a girlish whim. Her perfect honesty would in time

have reconciled him to her heiress-ship. True, it was highly probable that he might have rejected the loan, and given her plenty of trouble on that score. She might have had to experience the grief of seeing him refuse her aid and struggle on alone and single-handed ; but such men as Garth Clayton rarely get their heads under water for long. He would have moved heaven and earth rather than this girl to help him, and in the end would have attained to some fair measure of success ; and, while things were at this low ebb with him, he would have vexed himself and her by imposing a barrier of reserve and coldness on himself. Queenie would have been made to suffer for those riches of hers. He would have pointedly assigned to her the place she must hold in the future—a friendship not too close or intimate. If the girl's faithfulness could have served this rough apprenticeship, and she could have meekly acceded to these hard conditions, his man's heart must have spoken at last, and broken down all barriers between them.

After all, there is nothing like truth, pure, straightforward truth, especially to men of Garth's

calibre, who was a foe to all mystery, and disposed to treat such things somewhat harshly. But Queenie's foolish whim had ensnared her, and there was no freeing her feet from the meshes. One thing was clear to her, Garth must have the money at once.

And so the young intriguer set her brains to work. How was she to put this sum in his hands? how could she negotiate the loan so that it could not fail of acceptance? At first she proposed starting off to Carlisle and seeking Caleb Runciman's aid; she could twist Caleb round her little finger and make him do as she wanted. Should she concoct a letter and get the old man to copy it in his shaky handwriting? Only Emmie knew those crabbed, feeble characters, and she was never likely to see the letter. What could she say? and here Queenie got a pencil and paper and scrawled a rough draft.

"Dear sir," it began, "I have long taken a great interest in your work. The reforms you have introduced among the quarrymen are not only known at Hepshaw, they have reached further; and I have long wished to express to

you the respect and sympathy I entertain for your labor.

“It is a good work, a noble work, and it would be grievous if anything were to hinder or frustrate it. I have heard with much regret of the failure of the A—— Bank, and the difficulties in which it has involved you. Such difficulties, of course, are only temporary, but still it is at such times that one requires a helping hand. I have more wealth than I need for my own use, and at present there are a few hundreds for which I am wanting a safe investment; permit me to take the liberty of an old friend and well-wisher, and to place these hundreds to your account, to be repaid in quarterly or half-yearly instalments, as you think best. The sum is between eight and nine hundred; and you will be doing me an immense service if you will make use of this money instead of letting it lie by idly.

“I remain, sir, with profoundest respect and sympathy,

“AN UNKNOWN FRIEND AND WELL-WISHER.”

"P.S. The instalments to be paid to Messrs. Withern & Smithers, Carlisle."

"Will it do, I wonder?" asked Queenie with an anxious frown, as she laid down the document. "I hope Caleb will think it sounds business-like. That part about the quarterly or half-yearly instalments was a very happy hit, I don't think Caleb could have done it better. I named Messrs. Withern and Smithers because Mr. Calcott had no dealings with them. The only thing I am afraid of is, that Caleb is getting so old and dazed that he may make a mess of the whole business; and then, on the other hand, will Mr. Clayton accept anonymous aid? will he not ferret it out somehow? Messrs. Withern and Smithers know Caleb by sight, all the leading firms in Carlisle do, and then it will be somehow traced to him. Mr. Clayton will leave no stone unturned; he always hunts mysteries to death, as he says. He will go over to Carlisle and set all manner of enquiries on foot, and he will work it round to Caleb, and then there will be an end to the whole business."

“No ; I am afraid I must adopt the other course, much as I dislike it. I must take Mr. Logan into my confidence, and make him my cat’s-paw. I should not wonder if we both get terribly burnt in the end ; but never mind, I must transpose Louis XIV.’s sayings for my own benefit, *après nous le déluge*. Once get the money in his hands, and the quarry in working order, and I must bear the brunt of the rest ; he will not be so very angry with me when he knows—” But Queenie left the rest of the sentence unfinished.

And so it was that Mr. Logan got the following little missive the next morning :

“Dear Mr. Logan,

“I have something very important to say to you. Will you come round to me at five, if it will not greatly inconvenience you ? Emmie will be out, and I shall take care to be alone ; please say nothing about this to Miss Cosie.

“Yours sincerely,

“QUEENIE MARRIOTT.”

Queenie had a great liking and respect for Mr.

Logan. She came forward to meet him with a very frank blush when he entered the cottage the following afternoon. She was a trifle nervous at the task that lay before her, but her determination lent her courage.

She had seen Garth go past that morning looking ill and weary, as though from a sleepless night; and the memory of his pale, harassed face was with her as she spoke.

"It is very good of you to come to me, Mr. Logan; I think my note must have surprised you a little."

"Well, well, perhaps it did," he returned good-humoredly, putting down his felt hat and placing himself near her. He had laid aside his spectacles, and his keen, near-sighted eyes beamed on her full of benevolence and kindness.

"That part, I mean, about not telling Miss Cosie that you were coming here," she continued in her straightforward way. "The fact is, I am in a difficulty, and want the advice and assistance"—laying stress on the latter word—"of a friend."

"Then you were quite right to send for me;

a vicar ought always to be at the beck and call of his flock, and to be ready for any temporal and spiritual emergency ; the highest privilege we possess is the power of helping others. Now, supposing you tell me all about your difficulty ; I am prepared to listen for any indefinite time," with a bright, persuasive smile, for, in spite of her assumed courage, the girl's nervousness was not lost on him ; and Queenie, nothing loath, plunged boldly into her subject.

"Of course I know you will respect my secret ; but, all the same, I am afraid I shall shock you, for I have to acknowledge a little deception on my part. The fact is, Mr. Logan," continued Queenie with the utmost frankness, "I am not what I seem."

This statement, to say the least of it, was slightly startling ; for the moment Mr. Logan looked taken aback, but a glance at the bright, ingenuous face before him seemed to reassure him.

"You have all of you thought me poor," she went on, "and so I was when I first came among you ; but I am a rich woman now—I have five

thousand a-year," opening her eyes wide at the mention of this surprising sum.

"My dear young lady, do you mean this?"

"Yes, indeed; and of course I knew how greatly I should surprise you. It is a droll idea, that the school-mistress at Hepshaw should have five thousand a-year, is it not? I have hardly got used to the fact myself; and then, you see, even Emmie does not know. It was Emmie's uncle, Mr. Calcott, who left me all that money. But I know Cathy has told you all the particulars of that sad story; he could not leave it to Emmie, you see, and so it has all come to me; but I shall always feel as though it belongs most to her."

"I must say I am extremely astonished!"

Queenie looked a little mischievous at that.

"I congratulate you most heartily on your good fortune; but, all the same, I cannot understand your motives for secrecy. Here you have been for the last three months living in this cottage, and teaching in our village school, while all the time you might have been dwelling in ease and luxury." And, with all his knowledge

of human nature, Mr. Logan looked extremely perplexed.

"You must not be too hard on a girl's whim," she replied, looking down.

"Oh, it was a whim then!" with a dawning perception of the truth.

"Yes, it was just that," rather hastily. "You see I did not want the money, and it rather vexed me, coming in such quantities, and when everything was so nicely arranged. I had just been elected your school-mistress, and the cottage was being furnished for us, and Emmie was so looking forward to it, and I had grown to like you all so; and it seemed so hard to give it all up, and go and live in a grand house in Carlisle, as Caleb wanted us to do. And so I thought," with a little quiver of the lip she could not hide, "that I would just put it all away for a little while, and be happy and enjoy ourselves; and by-and-bye, when I had got tired of teaching, it would come out, and you would all laugh with me, and think it a good joke that Emmie and I had been living like disguised princesses."

"Ah, well! it is a pretty piece of girlish

romance," smiling in spite of himself; "but I must say I thought my schoolmistress was a very different sort of person—far more staid and matter-of-fact."

"And you are disappointed in her?" a little piteously, for Queenie had lately grown to distrust the wisdom of this freak of hers, and was sensitive in consequence.

"Nay, it is no such heinous offence; it is very venial and girlish," but Queenie blushed hotly at his tone. She was afraid Mr. Logan thought her very romantic and silly, missish, in fact.

"I wanted to be liked for myself, and in spite of my poverty. It was not so very foolish," defending herself somewhat plaintively.

"Well, well, perhaps not; we will not say any more about that," he continued soothingly, for the girl's cheeks were burning under his implied reproof. "One can carry out these sort of Quixotic schemes for a little while; but I should think by this time you have had enough teaching."

"No! oh no!" she cried, greatly alarmed at this. "I must go on for some time longer pre-

tending to be poor, for months, perhaps a whole year. Emmie is so happy, and I am quite content. Mr. Logan, you will promise not to betray me?"

"But, my dear young lady, there can be no possible reason for this!"

"Ah, but there is a very important reason," and now her manner changed, and became grave and anxious. "Don't you know I must help Mr. Clayton? and there is no means of doing that unless I go on pretending to be poor."

"And what good would that do him?"

"Why," she returned, hesitating, "you know him better than I do. If I were to go to him and tell him that I was rich, as I am telling you now, and offer to lend him money, he would put on his grand manner, and talk about independence, and make me feel ashamed of myself in a moment. Do you think he would take money from a girl, even in the shape of a loan? no; he would starve himself first, and bring them all to misery, and he would call his conduct manly and straightforward, and all sorts of fine names,

instead of putting it down to pride and sheer obstinacy."

"I must say I think you are right," watching her somewhat anxiously, for a strange excitement seemed upon her. "I think it very probable that he would refuse the loan."

"Yes; and then Langley and Cathy will suffer, and who would help them, Mr. Logan? I have been thinking about this nearly all night, and there is only one way of making him accept the loan — you must offer it in your own name."

He had been expecting this, for his manner testified no surprise; she had been leading up to this for the last ten minutes. Queenie's courage would have utterly failed if she had known how clearly those mild, near-sighted eyes were reading her. "Why it is the old story—a girl's first innocent romance," he said to himself.

"I knew what you were going to say," he returned aloud. "This is a very clever scheme of yours, Miss Marriott; but how is it to be carried out? Garth Clayton is perfectly aware that I have no surplus money lying by. All

Hepshaw knows that my living is hardly a rich one."

"Why, I have thought of that too," she went on excitedly. "But we can easily get over that difficulty. I will place nine hundred pounds to your account,—that can be done in the next few days; I have only to write to Caleb Runciman,—and you must go to Mr. Clayton and tell him that that sum of money has just come into your possession; that it is lying at the Carlisle Bank. It will be no falsehood, for I shall have made it over to you, entirely and solely for their benefit. And then you must insist on his using it as he requires, and paying you back in half-yearly instalments. You must be very careful and business-like in what you say to him," she went on, pointedly, "for he is so proud that he will not touch the money unless he thinks he can repay it; and you can tell him that he can pay you interest on the money, or do just as he pleases, so that we get him to take it."

"My dear child," he returned, much startled, and not a little touched at her earnestness, and, indeed, the brown glow of Queenie's eyes was

something pleasant to see, "this is a generous project of yours, and I hardly know what to say about it, except that I foresee many difficulties."

"But what of that?" she pleaded, "things are not always easy, we know. Surely you do not see any harm in my innocent little plot? There is nothing untrue in saying that you have this sum of money lying by, if I have given it into your own hands."

"Well, perhaps not; but I should be afraid of blundering on my part. You see, we Hepshaw people are very simple and straightforward. We know each other's affairs almost to the lining of our purses. We have never dealt in romance and mystery as you have done, and I am bound to confess that the piece of diplomacy you have entrusted to me is far beyond my powers. The ruse is so transparent that Garth would see through it in a moment."

"Oh no," she returned, clasping her hands; "you must not fail me, Mr. Logan; everything depends on you. Why," she continued, with one of her quick bursts of eloquence, "could you bear to see them leave Church-Stile House, with

Langley and Cathy breaking their hearts for their old home, and Mr. Clayton looking ill and harassed and working himself to death, and all for the sake of a few miserable hundreds, for which I have no possible use, which, probably, I shall not need at all? What would it matter if he did find us out," she went on boldly, but her words concealed a secret tremor, "so that he gets out of his difficulties first? One of these days, not now, but a long time hence, when he has paid some of it back, you shall go to him and tell him the truth, and, though he will pretend to be angry, I know he will forgive us at last, and thank us for having saved him in spite of himself."

Mr. Logan shook his head. "I am not quite so sure about that. I think our deception would annoy him terribly."

"Perhaps so; but after a time he will forget his annoyance. What does it matter if he be angry if we only do him good in spite of himself? It is the end for which we are working. We want to save him and Langley and Cathy from being ruined. It does not matter so much for

Ted, who is young and a man, and must work for himself. It is Langley and Cathy one must help," continued the girl, a little artfully. "I, for one, love them so dearly that I cannot bear to see them turned out of their old home, and made to feel how hard and bitter and cruel the world is, as Emmie and I have done.

That moved him, as she knew it would, for he got up and paced restlessly about the room. The muscles of his face twitched under the influence of his emotion. Queenie watched him anxiously, but did not venture to disturb his reverie. After a silence of some minutes he came and stood before her.

"Well, Mr. Logan?"

"Well," he returned, but very gravely, "I suppose I must do as you wish; I can't find it in my heart to resist your eloquence, or to see such dear friends on the brink of ruin without stretching out a helping hand. As far as Charlotte and I am concerned, we would share our last crust with them, but what was the use of flinging our mite into the pit? I am not without hopes that I may be able to refund your money

very soon, and to constitute myself their creditor, for, by all accounts, our poor old Aunt Prue is failing rapidly, and her death will make a tolerably rich man of me, that is to say, in a Hepshaw point of view."

Queenie did not like this, but what could she do; she would be ashamed to hint at her reluctance. It pleased her to feel that the secret bounty was from her hand, that she was repaying in this way a little of her debt of gratitude and affection; but, after all, might it not be well that Aunt Prue's money and not hers should be used.

"It is this that makes me less reluctant to undertake the business," he went on. "In a few weeks or months I might myself be in possession of ample means, though one never knows how long an aged invalid may linger. Still, as Garth's needs are so pressing, I will try my best to induce him to accept the loan. I am only afraid of Charlotte or myself making some stupid blunder."

"Miss Cosie!" exclaimed Queenie, very much startled. "Oh; Mr. Logan, you do not think we need tell her?" for Miss Cosie's absence of mind

and mistakes were even more proverbial in Hepshaw than her brother's; the extent of amiable blunders she had committed during the course of her blameless existence were simply innumerable.

"Why, of course we must tell Charlotte," with a smile at her evident discomfiture. "Garth is sure to say something to her about the loan, or else Miss Clayton or Miss Catherine will do so, and she must not be left in ignorance. Charlotte manages all the business at the Vicarage, you know, and her first words would be sure to be, 'Dear me, Christopher, we have not more than a hundred and fifty in the Bank, how can you lend Garth eight or nine hundred pounds?'"

"Yes, I see; it was very stupid of me not to think of that," returned Queenie, but her heart sank within her. If Miss Cosie were admitted to their council she could not long rely on secrecy.

"Ah, well, you have promised to carry this through for me," she continued with a sigh; "but do pray urge upon Miss Cosie to be very silent and discreet, a hint may spoil everything;

at any rate you must not speak to her until the money has been offered to Mr. Clayton."

"Oh no, I will guarantee as much as that. I am almost as anxious as you are in this matter." And then, after a few more words, he got up and took his leave.

CHAPTER VII.

"YOU KNOW THIS IS A GREAT SECRET."

" 'And had he friends?' 'One friend perhaps,' said he,
'And for the rest, I pray you let it be.' "—*Jean Ingelow.*

QUEENIE was terribly restless during the next few days. While the important negotiation was impending she held aloof as much as possible from her friends at Church-Stile House. She could scarcely look Garth in the face when she met him in the village, so heavily did her secret weigh upon her. She had been once to see Langley, and had sat with her some time; but their talk had languished, and at last degenerated into silence. Langley had been too sad and heavy-hearted to make any pretence of cheerfulness, and Queenie had been so oppressed with secret consciousness that she had failed in outward manifestations of sympathy.

“If talk would only mend matters you would have no reason to complain of my silence,” Langley said, by way of excuse for her down-heartedness, when Queenie rose to take leave.

“One cannot always talk ; I wish I were only as patient as you,” had been Queenie’s reply. But she breathed more freely when she had crossed the little bridge and was walking down the lane in the grey, waning light.

But Cathy came to the cottage, and was so low-spirited, and drew such dismal pictures of the future, that Emmie, who was weakly and tender-hearted, burst out crying, and for a long time refused to be comforted.

“Oh, Queen, if we were but rich !” sobbed the poor child, “how nice it would be to help them. I can’t bear to think of Langley and Cathy working as you used to work at Granite Lodge, and being hungry and cold and miserable. Cathy might come and live here, there is plenty of room.”

“Yes, yes, my sweet,” returned Cathy, drying her eyes and kissing her hurriedly, “I will promise to come to you if I am starving ; but I

am going to nurse the sick people in the great London Hospital, you know, and nurses are sure to get plenty to eat," and the warm-hearted girl changed the subject, and began a ludicrous narration of Ted's sayings and doings during the last few days.

But Emmie could not forget her friends' troubles ; she brooded over them silently, and at last made a little pilgrimage on her own account.

Garth, sitting moody and listless in his study, was surprised by a feeble tap, and then by the entrance of the child in her little scarlet hood.

"Why, Emmie, my dear," he said kindly, "has your sister brought you over to see us? surely you have not come alone this cold evening."

"Queenie and Cathy are talking so busily that they will not miss me ; they think I am with Patience. I did not mind the cold a bit ; I came all by myself, because I wanted to see you, Mr. Garth."

"To see me!" in a surprised tone, for, in spite of their friendship, Emmie had never before distinguished him in this way ; her visits had always been to Langley. "Well, I am highly

honored, and must make much of my visitor. Will this thing untie?" touching the red hood. But Emmie took no notice of his question; she stood beside him with her large blue eyes fixed gravely on his face, and then she put up her hand and stroked his cheek, but very gently and timidly.

"Poor Mr. Garth, I am so sorry for you."

"Why, my dear?" But he was touched in spite of himself, the little thin hand spoke so eloquently.

"Because you have lost all your money, and are so dreadfully unhappy. Was there a great deal, Mr. Garth?"

"Well, it was a tolerably large sum, at least for me," he replied gravely.

"And God has taken it away from you; that is very sad, is it not? I don't like to think of you being poor, it makes me feel bad all over."

"Why, Emmie, I never expected you to feel it like this! You must not trouble your dear little head about my affairs."

"I am sorry, but not half so sorry as Queenie

is, I know, though she says so little about it. She never talks now, at least hardly at all, and she has not told me stories for ever so long; but she sits and looks at the fire, and sometimes her eyes are full of tears, though she thinks I do not see them."

He flushed at this, and a look of pain crossed his face.

"She may have troubles of her own; she will not like you to tell me this," he began in an embarrassed tone; but Emmie was too much engrossed with her subject to heed him.

"Shall you be very poor?" she persisted; "shall you be obliged to leave this old house, where you and Langley were born, and go and live in a poky little place in Warstdale, as Cathy says?"

"Cathy knows nothing about it; she ought not to tell you such things," rather quickly. "Of course we must leave this house, and of course we shall have to work; but we are young, and that will not hurt us. Come, come, things are not as bad as you and Cathy make them out; put all these sad thoughts out of your head. How

could they have talked so before the child?" he muttered to himself.

But Emmie was not so easily comforted. She stood silently by Garth a minute, and then her eyes filled, and two large tears coursed slowly down her cheeks.

"Now, Emmie, don't be silly; I can't have you crying over this!" but his tone was kind; and as he spoke he drew the child gently to him.

"I can't help it," she whispered. "Cathy says you eat nothing, and that you are getting so thin and ill; and that frightens Queenie, and makes her look grave."

"Why, this is too absurd!" he began, and then his tone changed. The child would make herself ill if she went on like this. "Do you think you could make me some tea and some hot buttered toast if I were to promise to eat it? Now I think about it I am rather faint, and hot buttered toast is a favorite luxury of mine. Langley will find you the toasting-fork and things if you go and ask her."

In a moment Emmie's tears were dried by


magic, and the little red hood laid aside. When, half-an-hour afterwards, Queenie entered the house in some alarm to know what had become of Emmie, she found a little scene that surprised her.

Garth and Emmie were seated with a little round table between them; a choice pile of buttered toast, done to a nicety, lay on the young man's plate. Emmie's face was flushed with excitement and heat, her hands were slightly blackened.

"He has promised to eat all that!" she cried out, pointing with the teapot in the direction of Garth's plate; "and he says he feels better already. I have made the tea so strong, just as he likes it. Langley let me go to the caddy myself!"

Garth rose with a droll expression and shook hands with Queenie.

"Emmie has played truant, I am afraid. She has got it into her head that I am starving myself to death as the best way of escaping my difficulties. I have had to eat and drink before her to dissipate the unpleasant idea."



"Oh, Emmie! how could you think of running away like this?" exclaimed her sister, fondly pressing the child's fair head between her hands; but she said very little to either of them after that. In the months to come that little scene often recurred to her, and the strange, embarrassed look on Garth's face as she entered.

More than a week had elapsed since the two conspirators had met in the little parlor at Briewood Cottage. Queenie was just beginning to feel that the suspense was becoming terrible, when one night, as she was sitting alone after Emmie had gone to bed, she heard Mr. Logan's voice in the entry, and in another moment he came in shaking the raindrops off him.

"Well," he said, beaming on her through his spectacles, "I have not kept you too long waiting, have I? Of course you have been very anxious, but a delicate matter like this required plenty of time and management."

"Oh, yes, I know," she replied hastily; "but, all the same, my suspense has been dreadful. Tell me quickly, Mr. Logan. Has he taken it?"

"He has."

"Oh, thank heaven!" she exclaimed, and turned away lest the relief and joy should be too legibly written on her face.

"It has been a difficult job," he went on, sitting down and spreading his white, finely-shaped hands over the blaze. "At one time I feared whether I could carry it through. He was so hard to manage; but I timed it well, and spoke before Miss Clayton. I knew I could count on her common-sense to help me."

"But how did you begin? Did you say the words I put into your mouth? Tell me all about it, please," and Queenie tried to compose her glowing face.

"I can hardly remember my words. I said very little at first. I told Garth that a sum of money had lately come into my possession, and was lying idle at the Carlisle Bank; that it was there, and that I intended to make no use of it; and I entreated him, for his sisters' sake, to lay aside his pride and accept the loan offered to him."

"Well?"

"Well, he was very difficult at first. He

seemed cut up, poor fellow, and very low over the whole business. He would have it that it was dishonest to help himself to another man's money unless he could see his way clear to repay it in a fair time ; that his embarrassment was such that, even with this help, it might be two or three years before he could perfectly right himself ; that he had had other losses lately ; and that perhaps the wisest course would be to throw up the Works and take a manager's place himself. ‘ We should not starve on a hundred and fifty a-year, and Ted. would earn something,’ he said more than once.”

“ Of course, you did not give in to him ? ”

“ No ; I grew tremendously eloquent, and Langley helped me. I talked myself hoarse for nearly two hours before I could move him. I hurled all sorts of thunders at him. I anathematized the Clayton pride as an unholy thing. I told him that it was a grievous sin against charity to refuse the help of a friendly hand when it was stretched out to save him. What would have been thought of the conduct of the poor traveller if he had refused the assistance of the good

Samaritan ; if he had lain there in his obstinacy, declaring that no such bindings up of oil and wine should be his ?”

“ Ah, you had him there.”

“ Well, he did look a little uneasy at that; and then I plied him with arguments. Did he think it a manly thing to let his sisters go out into the world and work because he could not do as other men did under such circumstances, and bend that pride of his ? I noticed he winced at that. And then I upbraided him with his want of friendship. What did Charlotte and I want with the money ? we had sufficient for our simple needs. Buy books with it ? for he actually suggested that in a feeble sort of way. Did he think we were such lukewarm Christians that we should lay it out in luxuries while our dearest friends were on the brink of ruin ?”

“ I can well imagine your eloquence.”

“ It was worse than preaching half-a-dozen sermons. I was just getting weary and out of breath when Langley came to my rescue, and begged him, with tears in her eyes, not to grieve me ; and then between us we talked

him into a better and more hopeful state of mind.”

“And he consented to accept it at last?”

“Yes; he is to draw two hundred and fifty to-morrow to meet some bills that are pressing upon him, and next week he is to take three hundred more, that will put him straight; but he will require the remainder for current expenses. It appears there will be little or no profit coming in from the Works for the next six months. His great fear is that he may not be able to repay me for two or three years.”

“What does that matter?” exclaimed the girl, joyfully. “Oh, Mr. Logan, how shall I thank you for doing what you have done to-night? How did he look? and what did Langley say to you?”

“Well, he looked very pale, poor fellow; but I think on the whole he is very grateful and relieved. I know he wrung my hand nearly off when I took my leave. I felt such a consummate hypocrite when Miss Clayton burst into tears, and thanked me for saving her brother.

I wonder what they would say if they knew the truth !”

“Hush ! we will not say anything about that. Have you come straight from Church-Stile House ? does Miss Cosie know yet ?”

“No ; but I must tell her directly I get home. By-the-bye, where is Miss Catherine, I missed her to-night ?”

“She is spending the evening with Mrs. Stewart. Dr. Stewart has gone over to Karldale for the night. Mrs. Chester is very ill, and there is to be a consultation.”

“Her days are numbered, poor soul, at least I greatly fear so,” he returned very gravely, and soon afterwards he took his leave.

Queenie could scarcely compose herself to sleep that night, her relief was so intense ; but in the morning the old fear obtruded itself. Could they rely with any degree of safety on Miss Cosie ?

“Solomon tells us, that in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom,” she thought to herself ; “but I do not think it holds good in the case of a dear fussy little old maid like

Miss Cosie." And then she groaned in spirit, and finally decided to go then and there to the vicarage, and threaten that harmless old maiden with all sorts of pains and penalties if she did not keep that busy tongue of hers in order.

She found her in an old wooden out-house, that went by the name of the dairy, busily skimming a great bowl of yellow cream, with the inevitable grey shawl pinned round her, and a little drawn grey hood tied over her curls.

When she caught sight of her visitor she dropped her spoon, and came clattering over the brick floor in her little clogs.

"Dear, dear, it is never you, Miss Marriott! and not a wink of sleep have I got all night with thinking of you and those poor creatures at Church-Stile House; but there, there, I must not upset you," went on the little woman breathlessly, reaching up on tiptoe to kiss her.

"Dear Miss Cosie, I knew how glad you would be."

"Glad! I couldn't coin the word that would express my feeling. I seem as though I were made of india-rubber, I feel so drawn out and

expanded with sheer happiness. It is a mountain that is lifted off me and Christopher, that's what it is," continued the soft-hearted little creature, wiping her eyes, and dimpling all over her round bright face. "Dear, dear, to think that you are a rich woman, and all the rest of it."

"Now, Miss Cosie, remember this is a great secret," began Queenie solemnly.

"My dear, I wouldn't breathe a word to a soul not if it were to save my life. Didn't Christopher tell me all about it last night, sitting there in his big chair, looking so good and beautiful, more fit to be lifted straight up to heaven, as I always say, than to be down here in father's big elbow chair, and with the tears all but running down his cheeks, so that he had to take off his spectacles to wipe them."

"But, Miss Cosie—"

"And to begin in that joking way, too," went on Miss Cosie, too intent on her reminiscences to heed the interruption. "'Well, Charlotte, my dear,'—I hardly thought I should be deceived at my time of life in this bare-faced manner,—

'what do you think this sly little puss of a schoolmistress has been doing?' that's how he began."

"I wish I had been behind the door."

"Why, it was as good as a play, and he enjoying my fright, for I was quite in a fuss and worry in a moment. 'Don't tell me that our Miss Marriott could do anything wrong, for I won't believe it, Kit,' I returned; 'for she is as good a girl as ever lived, and a better sister to that poor little sickly child never breathed, and you may take my word for it, as sure as my name is Charlotte Logan.'"

"Thank you for that, dear Miss Cosie."

"'Don't put yourself out, Charlotte, there is no reason for it,' he answers, quite calmly. 'I am not saying a word against Miss Marriott's goodness; but she is a sly little creature for all that, for she is hiding from us all that she is a rich woman, with a tidy little fortune of five thousand a-year.' Dear, dear, the maze I was in when he said that!"

"If only I had been there!" ejaculated Queenie feelingly.

"I wouldn't believe it for a long time, and then it seemed to come on me like a flash. 'Why of course, Kit, my dear,' I said, as well as I could speak for crying, for he had been telling me all about the Brierwood Cottage conspiracy as he called it, and a more blessed deed of charity never reached my ears; but it shall be restored four-fold, pressed out and running over, and all that, my dear, you may rest assured of that. 'Why it stands to reason, Kit, my dear,' I said, 'that a young lady like Miss Marriott, who has the carriage of a duchess, and puts on her clothes well, and always holds her head high, and looks you in the face, and moves about as though she knew there was a barouche and pair waiting for her round every corner; why it stands to reason that a noble young creature like that should turn out to be somebody.'"

"But, Miss Cosie," exclaimed Queenie, trying not to laugh in the little woman's face, "I am the same that I was before; it does not make any difference in me, really, because Emmie's uncle chose to leave me all his money."

"No, my dear, certainly not; and of course in

church you will always call yourself a miserable sinner, and all that, and of course that will be right and proper ; but if only you could have heard what Christopher said about you ! but I must not make you vain."

" Ah, Mr. Logan has been so good in helping me ; he has managed everything so cleverly," returned Queenie, thankful to turn Miss Cosie's thoughts into a less embarrassing channel.

" My dear, you have no conception of Christopher's cleverness ; he ought to be the bishop of the diocese, or the prime minister, with that head of his. No one can hold a candle to him, that is what I always say ; he is the wisest and the best and the cleverest man I ever knew, in spite of his never remembering to take a clean handkerchief out of his drawers unless I put it ready for him. Why he actually ran after the bishop in that old patched dressing-gown of his ; but I have told you that story before," interrupting herself just in time, and stopping to take breath. Now was Queenie's opportunity.

" Miss Cosie," she began, still more solemnly than before, " you know this is a great secret,

and that it must be only known 'to us three."

"Yes, yes ; of course, my dear."

"If the truth were to leak out in any way the whole plan will be spoilt. Mr. Clayton would not touch the money if he knew it were mine and not Mr. Logan's, and then he and Langley and Cathy would be ruined."

"My dear, as though I would breathe a syllable !"

"No ; you will not mean to say a word, but, all the same, a hint or a moment's forgetfulness would betray us. Ah, there is Langley coming up the garden ; she has come, of course, to thank you as well as Mr. Logan. Dear, dear Miss Cosie, do promise to be careful !"

"There, there, you are quite agitated, and no wonder ; but you may trust me ; oh, you may trust me !" returned Miss Cosie with a soothing pat and nod.

But she had no time to add more, for Langley was approaching them with her pale face brightened with unwonted smiles.

"Dear Miss Cosie, I hardly know what I am

to say to you and Mr. Logan," she exclaimed, clasping the little woman in her arms with unusual warmth, for Langley, in spite of her gentleness, was not a demonstrative woman.

"There, there, say nothing at all about it," returned Miss Cosie hurriedly and nervously; "that is by far the wisest plan, is it not, Miss Marriott?" appealing in some alarm to her young companion.

"Yes; Miss Cosie would rather not be thanked," returned Queenie in a low voice.

"Must I not tell you good dear people what I think of you both?" continued Langley in her soft, persuasive manner. "When one's heart is brimming over with gratitude one cannot refrain from speaking. I always knew what unselfish Christians you were, but now you have proved it without doubt."

"Oh, my dear, this is dreadful! pray, pray do not say any more, you make me quite unhappy," exclaimed Miss Cosie, putting up her plump hands in dismay. "Miss Marriott, if you love me, ask this dear soul not to say any more."

"I think it upsets her and Mr. Logan to be

thanked," observed Queenie, turning her face a little aside, for Miss Cosie's helplessness and terror moved her to inward laughter. "I think I would let it be, Langley."

"Yes, do, there's a dear good creature," returned Miss Cosie, breathing a little more freely; "it cuts one like a knife to hear you, and then to know that one has nothing to do with the matter at all."

"Miss Cosie means that she and Mr. Logan have no present use for the money, that they did not intend to spend it," put in Queenie calmly; "but she is so flurried and upset by the whole business that it is kindest not to talk to her at all upon the subject. It only distresses her kind heart," went on the young girl with the utmost calmness, though her heart sank over Miss Cosie's first blunder.

And Langley, with her usual tact, quietly changed the subject.

But Queenie returned home ill-at-ease.

"I feel as though I were walking over a mine that might explode at any moment under my feet," she said to Mr. Logan when he came to

her the next day to inform her that Garth had paid that visit to the Carlisle Bank. "I hardly dare trust Miss Cosie out of my sight."

"Oh, it will be all right," he answered soothingly; "in a few days the subject will have blown over, and she will have forgotten all about it. Don't trouble yourself. This little plot of yours is making you nervous."

"I think it is," she returned frankly; "my peace of mind is quite gone, and I do nothing but anticipate difficulties; but, all the same, I would not undo our work," smiling in her old bright manner.

CHAPTER VIII.

CROSS PURPOSES.

“ When love shall, pitying, call me home,
To that sweet, sweet home that has long been hers,
With yearning rapture my eyes will roam
O'er throngs of the sainted worshippers.
For I think the child with the starry eyes,
Who vanished away to that far-off land,
Will look from some window in Paradise,
And beckon me in with her tiny hand.”

Helen Marion Burnside.

QUEENIE'S forebodings were not verified, for, in spite of two untoward circumstances, the greater part of the winter passed quietly to the inhabitants of the cottage and Church-Stile House.

Only two things marred its perfect harmony. Garth had not yet spoken, and Cathy had bade good-bye to her friends at Hepshaw, and had begun her London work in earnest.

Queenie felt the loss of her friend bitterly ; every one missed the bright, light-hearted girl. Cathy's moods had of late been strangely variable : fits of despondency had alternated with bursts of wild, exuberant spirits ; a certain sweet recklessness had tinged even her farewell greetings.

They were all at the station to see her off, even Mr. Logan and Miss Cosie, and at the last moment Dr. Stewart appeared.

Queenie seemed utterly quenched, and Langley looked depressed and tearful ; but Cathy looked at them all with her bright, resolute smile.

" Good-bye, dear friends ; don't miss me too much, before long I shall be amongst you again," she said, as she waved her hand gaily, and the train moved slowly away.

A curiously sweet expression crossed Mr. Logan's face as he walked by Queenie's side down the path bordered by plane trees that led from the station to the Deerhound.

" Miss her ! how can we help missing her ?" cried the girl, appealing to him with sorrowful eyes, as though to claim his sympathy. " Langley will be dreadfully lonely without her, and as for

Emmie and me ! why she was the only friend that we had at Granite Lodge, the dearest, and the kindest, and the bravest." But here Queenie's eulogy ended in a little sob.

"Young things love to try their strength," replied Mr. Logan, softly. "We would fain clip their wings, but they would be sure to grow again. When I think of Miss Catherine," he went on, his eyes darkening strangely, "going out so bravely to her work in the heart of the great city without a tear on her bright face, however much her heart may be aching at leaving us all behind, I cannot help thinking of the white dove flying all those days over those wastes of water, with the olive branch in its mouth, and what Noah must have felt when he pulled it into the ark. It did not come to him even of its own accord, the wild weary thing, but he must needs put out his hand and draw it into its refuge."

Queenie looked up at him somewhat startled, but he did not seem to notice her surprise ; his eyes had a far-off, abstracted look in them, and during the remainder of the walk he preserved an almost unbroken silence.

Cathy wrote long cheery letters, full of amusing descriptions. She liked her work on the whole, she told them, and was not daunted by the difficulties that beset the path of beginners. "It was all in the day's work," as she wrote; "and what was the good of possessing a fount of endurance fit for a Spartan woman if there was nothing to bear. In fact, I am determined to serve my noviciate properly, and to make the best of things. I am no more inclined to see bugbears now than I was to discern Emmie's favorite ghost in the old garret at Granite Lodge; so make your mind easy, my precious old Queen, and do not indulge in any more troublesome fancies on my account."

Queenie did not show these letters to any one but Emmie; but the two gloated over them in private, and tried to imagine Cathy in her black stuff dress and little white cap, moving among the dim wards with her light springy step hushed so as not to disturb the sleepers, "looking not a bit like our Cathy, but like any other ordinary person," as Emmie observed with a sigh. But if Queenie missed her friend now,

the time was to come when she would yearn for her out of the fulness of an over-charged and wounded heart ; when her first thought would be, " If only Cathy were here."

Things were not quite satisfactory between herself and Garth Clayton. The young man had grown strangely shy in his ways with her, and held himself almost entirely aloof from the cottage.

The fact was, Garth was in a predicament.

He was more in love than ever ; but in his present circumstances marriage was out of the question. How was he to bring home a wife to the old home, entangled as he was by a load of debt and difficulties ?

Garth was perfectly honest in his intentions. He had made up his mind that Queenie Marriott was the woman he loved ; but he had a man's horror of a long engagement. " What's the good of telling a girl you love her if you can't see your way clear to make her your wife ?" he always said ; and he acted on this opinion so thoroughly that his quiet withdrawal of attentions filled the girl's heart with dismay.

“ Would he be so cold and distant with me if he really loved me ? ” Queenie asked herself. “ He never comes to see me now, and if I go up to Church-Stile House he is always so busy, and seems as if he fears to be alone with me. Does he think that I want him to pay me attentions if he has ceased to care for me in the way he did ? ” asked the girl, her breast heaving at the thought ; and she mourned for the loss of her friend, and in her secret soul refused to be comforted.

But she knew nothing of the conflict that went on under that assumed coldness of manner that wounded her so greatly.

Garth found his life anything but easy just now ; to be sure, ruin no longer stared him in the face, but his debt was a secret torment to him, and fretted his proud nature with a sense of positive injury.

He would fain have drawn out as little as possible of the sum placed for his benefit, but his needs were pressing. Scarcity of orders, the rise in the men’s wages, the heavily-freighted accounts of the cottages he had so lavishly provided for his workmen, had obliged him to expend already

seven or eight hundred pounds of the money. The quarry was now in good working order again; and in a few months the young master of Warstdale trusted that he would be enabled to repay the first instalment of the debt; and then, and not till then, would he open his lips to speak any words of love.

Garth was capable of keeping any resolution that he had formed. It was no fear of betraying himself that made him avoid Queenie; but the girl's presence was so sweet to him, and the longing to tell what was in his heart was so great, that the pain of such silence was unendurable to him.

And so he quietly withdrew himself, and went on with his daily work as though no such thoughts were his; and Queenie meekly accepted her banishment and bore Langley's reproaches on her unsociability as patiently as she could, until Langley discovered how matters were, and held her peace ever afterward like a wise woman, and petted and made much of the girl when she came down to the cottage.

And Queenie saw little of Garth, only lifting

her brown eyes timidly to his face when she met him in the village, and he stopped to exchange a greeting with her and Emmie; but he never once said, "Why do we see you so seldom at Church-Stile House?" but only asked kindly after hers and the child's welfare, and bade her wrap up Emmie and cherish her now the bitter winter weather had set in.

Queenie ate her Christmas dinner at the vicarage, with only Mr. Logan and Miss Cosie; and her New Year's day was spent at Juniper Lodge. The Claytons were not present on either of these occasions; Garth had gone up to London to see Cathy, and Langley had spent both days at Karldale Grange in Gertrude Chester's sick room. A long season of suffering that no skill could avert or tenderness alleviate had set in for the unhappy lady, and Langley's services were in constant requisition.

Now and then Mr. Chester came over to Hepshaw. He always paid a visit to the cottage, and would go up, as a matter of course, into Emmie's little room, and sit for a long time by the empty bed where his darling had slept her

little life away, and then he would come sorrowfully down again, and he and Queenie would talk softly of the child and her endearing ways.

These visits always made Queenie feel very sad. Time had not mitigated the father's heavy loss. He still mourned heavily for his little Nan. His florid face looked pale and haggard. A few threads of grey were clearly perceptible in the golden brown beard; but his eyes always lighted up with a look of tenderness when Queenie mentioned his wife.

"Ah, my poor Gertie," he would say, sorrowfully. "You would scarcely know her, Miss Marriott, she is so changed; she suffers 'so terribly. Langley will have told you; and yet since the death of our little darling there has never been a word or breath of complaint. She endures her worst agonies with fortitude; even Dr. Stewart marvels at her, and says he had never witnessed greater stoicism. It is only 'Hold my hand, Harry,' or 'I shall soon be relieved, dear husband, when this attack has passed,' just that, and nothing more."

“Yes, indeed ; Langley cannot say enough in her praise, she says her self-control is wonderful.”

“Poor soul, she’s fighting away her life by inches. You cannot tell what a man feels when he sees his wife suffering and is helpless to relieve it. Sometimes I think that for her sake I shall be thankful when it is over, and she is with the child. I can’t get it out of my mind that she ought to have her mother or myself to take care of her ; she must feel so lost in that great glittering place.”

“She is safer and better cared for there than even in your arms, dear Mr. Chester.”

“Yes, I know ; and Gertie reproves me and says I am a sad heathen, and so I am ; but I am sure of one thing,” speaking in a voice of suppressed emotion : “that if I am ever good enough—God help me for the sinner that I am,—but if I am ever helped to win an entrance in heaven, that my little Nan will be the first to see me, and she will come running to me, the darling, and I shall feel the clasp of her sweet arms about me, and the softness of her baby face against mine ; and ‘father’s come,’ she will say

that first, I know," breaking off hurriedly as the tears came into Queenie's eyes.

"And a little child shall lead them." The words seemed to come to her mind with sudden, irrepressible force. What if he were right, though he spoke only the language of love's fantasy? Might not the baby hand be stretched out to him through the darkness and silence that lay between those two loving souls, ever beckoning him on to possible good and high endeavour, through devious wanderings, past yawning pitfalls, over the tumultuous sea of life, beckoning with faint invisible touches, ever higher and higher.

"Father's come." Fanciful, and yet what more probable in the mystery of Providence and God's dealing with men than this, that amid the shining crowds the form of his little Nan should softly glide towards him; and even there in God's bright home a little child shall lead them.

And so with all apparent quietness, but with many secret anxieties, the winter wore softly away.

A week's holiday at Christmas had given the

young school-mistress a short reprieve from her duties, and she had taken advantage of it to pay a three days' visit to her old friend Caleb Runciman. Emmie had pleaded hard to accompany her, but the weather was unusually inclement, and Queenie shrank from exposing the child's delicacy to such a test; so she remained under Mrs. Fawcett's charge, as Langley was engrossed with continual visits to Karldale Grange.

Caleb and Molly made much of their visitor, but the old man grumbled a good deal over his favorite's looks.

"Well, Miss Queenie, I don't believe school-keeping has agreed with you after all," he began, shaking his head. "She is thin, Molly, is she not, and looks a bit graver than she used to look?"

"Now, Caleb, don't begin fancying such nonsense. I was never better in my life. Think of this hearty meal I have just eaten; thin indeed!" and Queenie opened her brown eyes and threw up her pretty head with a movement of disdain.

"Of course you must be having your own way, Miss Queenie dear," returned the old man

as he lighted his pipe ; “but, all the same, I don’t believe that Hepshaw air agrees with you both. There, why the precious lamb has a cough, didn’t you tell Molly so just now ? and you are ever so much thinner yourself, my pretty ; and when is it all going to end, this play-acting, the school-mistressing, I mean, and you and the blessed lamb settle down comfortably, like sensible-minded Christians, in a nice handsome home of your own, eh, Miss Queenie ? ”

“ Why, I don’t know, Caleb,” stammered the girl, rather startled at this very direct question, “ I don’t know at all ; I have not made up my mind. Not before the end of the summer ; no, certainly not before then.”

Caleb laid down his pipe with a dissatisfied look.

“ I thought better of your common-sense, I did, indeed, Miss Queenie.”

“ Now, Caleb, if you are going to be cross I shall tell Molly to pack up my bag, and I shall just take the next train home. What is the good of being an heiress if one is never to have one’s own way ? ”

"You have had it for a pretty long spell, I'm thinking," returned the old man with unusual pettishness, but the girl's whim fretted him sorely. "Mark my words, Miss Queenie, you will play at this thing a bit too long."

"I shouldn't wonder if you were right," a touch of gravity replacing her fun ; "and I think myself that it would be as well to fix a limit, for fear I should be tempted to put off the evil hour."

"Eh, eh ! now you are going to be sensible."

"I must have six clear months. Let me see, I will say the first of August. There, Caleb, on the first of August I will enter into possession of my riches. Will that content you ?"

"Why not say May or June, Miss Queenie ?"

"No ; not a day, not an hour before," returned the girl resolutely. "My dear old friend, this is not a whim only, it is real stern necessity. The dearest friends I possess have been in great trouble, as you know, and my seeming poverty has enabled me to help them ; it is for their sake, not mine, that I am making this further

delay. There, it is decided ; and now let us talk of something else," she finished gaily.

But Caleb was only half-mollified.

"She is thinner, and looks different somehow," he said to his faithful confidante, Molly, that night. "There is a peaking look in her brown eyes, like a half-fledged bird that sees its nest, but can't find its way to it. I doubt that she is not quite happy, Molly."

"Nay ; she is no differ from other young girls," returned Molly sbrewdly. "Bless your dear heart, Mr. Runciman, they are all alike ! they fret a bit, and then cheer up. It is the law of nature, that's where it is ; she will be as perky and chirping-like as ever by-and-bye," and Molly, who knew the symptoms well, and had buried her own sweetheart many years ago, changed the subject with womanly tact and sympathy.

CHAPTER IX.

“TOO MANY COOKS.”

“Make the doors upon a woman’s wit, and it will out at the casement; shut that, and ’twill out of the keyhole; stop that, ’twill fly with the smoke out of the chimney.”

Shakespeare.

It was a mild day in February, and as Queenie closed the door of the little school-house, and walked up the field that led to the vicarage, it seemed to her as though the very air held a promise of spring. Now Queenie, like all healthy young creatures, dearly loved the spring-time; to her imaginative temperament there could be nothing more beautiful and satisfying than to watch this spectacle of a faded and dead nature rising again into fresh life.

“How can people say there is no hereafter, when the miracle of the resurrection is every

year repeated before our eyes?" she said to herself. To her there was ever a fresh pleasure in seeing the brown, lifeless limbs of the elms and sycamores gradually clothe themselves, first with budding shoots, and then with fair, green leaves. The bursting hedgerows, the unfolding of the fronds of ferns, the first peep of the fairy white bells of snowdrops, the pale glitter of primroses, and the fragrance of violets, gave her a positive feeling of happiness.

Everything so new, so fresh, so fair, soiled by no dust, scorched by no burning sunshine; the whole world bright and unsullied as a baby soul, to whom good and evil are unknown mysteries, and life means nothing but perpetual satisfaction and content.

Queenie had a little errand to fulfil at the vicarage; one of her scholars was ill, and she wanted Miss Cosie's recipe for a certain compound that Miss Cosie judged to be highly efficacious in such cases.

She entered the little parlor with her usual light step. Miss Cosie was engaged in her favorite occupation—knitting socks for her brother. She

put down her work with a little flurry when she caught sight of her visitor.

"There, there," exclaimed the little woman, turning very red, "Christopher was right, as he always is, dear old fellow ; and of course you've come to scold me."

"To scold you, dear Miss Cosie !"

"Dear, dear, to think of my poor head getting into such a muddle, and the words slipping out before I knew they were coming. Why, I could have bitten my troublesome tongue I was so vexed with myself ; but what was the use of crying over spilt milk, as my poor mother used to say, and a secret is sure to be proclaimed on the house-top some time or other, as I told Mr. Garth."

"Now, Miss Cosie, what does this mean ?" asked Queenie, conscious of an uncomfortable sensation creeping over her ; little Janie's sore throat was quite forgotten. "Do you mean that, after all my entreaties and warnings, you have betrayed me ?"

"There, there, perhaps it is not so bad as you think," returned Miss Cosie, patting her curls

nervously, and prefacing her words with a gentle cough ; " it was only just a sentence or two that I let drop to Mr. Garth when he came in here last night for a pleasant chat with Christopher and me."

" Well ? " somewhat sternly, for there was no denying that Queenie was a trifle angry.

" Well, we were sitting as comfortably as possible ; Christopher hadn't come in, he had gone to baptize Wheeler Wilson's baby, and none too soon, for it died this morning ; and I took it its little burying gown, and laid it out, the precious blossom, myself. And very touching it was, and the poor mother crying her eyes out, because it looked so pretty ; and well, if she does take a drop of spirits now and then we are all miserable sinners, the very best of us, and Wheeler Wilson is none too careful ; and—where was I, dearie ? for I have just gone and muddled myself again, I believe."

" You said you were alone with Mr. Clayton," returned Queenie, with an inward prayer for patience. Miss Cosie's garrulity was terribly trying.

"Yes; he was sitting there just where you are, and he was talking and laughing and making believe to joke,—you know his way,—but all of a sudden he turned serious. 'Miss Cosie,' he said, 'I have never spoken to you about that money. Langley tells me you don't like to be thanked; but, all the same, you and your brother have earned my gratitude for the rest of my life, and I must say, God bless you for it!' flushing up to the roots of his hair, poor young fellow, what with the heat of the fire and his feelings together."

Queenie's hands clasped each other rather tightly, but she made no observation as Miss Cosie paused to take breath.

"Well, I was turning the heel of my stocking, and I don't believe I rightly took in the meaning of his words. 'You have nothing to thank us for,' I said, as innocently as possible. 'We would have lent it you and welcome, over and over again, Mr. Garth,' I said; 'but Kit is as poor as a church mouse, and we hadn't more than a matter of ninety pounds or so in the Bank.'"

“Miss Cosie, were you in your senses?” burst from Queenie’s indignant lips.

“Well, I was a bit dazed, I believe, for turning the heel of a stocking is rather a delicate job to do by the firelight, and Dolly had forgotten to light the lamp; but I was frightened as soon as I had said it, for there he was staring at me with his eyebrows lifted, and making me all of a tremble. ‘Ninety! you mean nine hundred pounds, Miss Cosie!’ he said, quite sharply, for he could not make me out at all. ‘No; ninety, Mr. Garth,’ I returned, for I knew I had gone too far, and a lie is a thing I have never taken on my lips; but I was all of a shake thinking about what Christopher and you would say to me, and there he was forcing the truth out of me with his eyes. ‘What’s the use of trying to deceive him?’ I thought, ‘I am brought to book, and nothing but a heap of falsehoods can save me,’ and a falsehood has never come natural to me since I was a baby, and poor mother read to me the story of Ananias and Sapphira,” finished Miss Cosie in her innocent way.

"Go on ; I am listening," sighed Queenie in a resigned voice.

"Well, I couldn't tell a direct story, as I said before, but I thought just a tiny bit of deception wouldn't be wrong. 'There is only ninety pounds now, Mr. Garth,' I went on ; but that wouldn't do at all. 'I don't like the look of this,' he muttered, and such a frown came over his face, for he was getting put out with my stammering and nervousness. 'Miss Cosie, tell me the truth, as you are an honest woman ; did you and Mr. Logan lend me these nine hundred pounds ?' 'Why no, Mr. Garth,' I answered, for there was no evading such a direct question. 'Then, in the name of heaven, who did lend me the money ?' he asked, looking as cross and perplexed as possible. Well, I didn't want to answer him till Christopher came in, for I felt I had done enough mischief for one evening, so I let him guess one person after another, till he jumped up and said he could bear it no longer ; he would go out and find Mr. Logan, or perhaps Miss Marriott might be in the secret, and could give him an idea who his secret benefactor was. Yes ; he would go and ask her first,

for she always spoke the truth, and would tell him at once if she knew who had lent him the money."

"I wish he had come to me. Yes; I wish he had spoken to me himself," murmured Queenie.

"Dear, dear, to think of that! and all I thought was to prevent his coming. 'You must not go near her, Mr. Garth,' I said, 'for she is so sensitive that she would half break her heart if you were to say an angry word to her; and the poor child meant well when she lent you the money.' 'The poor child! what do you mean, Miss Cosie?' for he thought me daft, I could see that. 'I was talking of Miss Marriott, what has she got to do with it, I should like to know?' 'Dear, dear, this is dreadful, Mr. Garth,' I cried, for he was standing over me, and wringing the truth out of me by inches. 'Why don't you go and ask Christopher, he will tell you all about it?' 'I will,' he answered, quite steadily, but there at the very moment was Kit standing on the threshold looking at us, and I clapping my hands with joy to see him."

"And what did Mr. Logan say?" asked Queenie with a proud flush upon her face.

"Well, there was no keeping it back after that. Kit told him everything clearly out, and how you were a rich woman and all that, and how you had begged and prayed him to lend the money in his name."

"Tell me, tell me quickly, for I can bear no more, did Mr. Clayton seem very angry?"

"Angry! oh, dear no," returned Miss Cosie, soothingly. "All his fierceness died away, and he seemed quite lamb-like directly Christopher spoke. After the first exclamation of surprise he never said a word, but just sat looking as pale and dazed as possible until Kit had finished all he had to say, and then he got up and said that he must tell Langley, and he shook hands with me and Christopher and went away."

"And he said nothing more?"

"No; his eyes looked a little queer, and I noticed his hand felt cold, but he would not listen to me when I pressed him to have some hot elder wine. I do believe he was quite in a

maze with astonishment and being taken so aback, poor young man."

"Thank you for telling me all," Queenie said very quietly, as she stood up and drew on her gloves. Little Jane's sore throat was quite forgotten; she was rather pale, and her lips trembled slightly as she spoke, but there was no trace of excitement in her manner.

"And you are not vexed with me, my dear."

"Oh, no, I am not vexed; it may all be for the best, you know." Her brief wrath had vanished. Who could long be angry with Miss Cosie, with her gentle little mouse-face and tender-hearted ways? she was not to blame, surely, for this strange sinking of heart, for these uneasy fears.

Something must have happened to the Spring sun-light, it was so much less radiant as she crossed the threshold of the Vicarage, a little of the glory and freshness had died out of it somehow. "Can he really be angry with me? I feel I cannot bear this suspense a moment longer, I must know the worst at once. Ah! is it possible?" and a slight trembling passed over the

girl's frame, for there was Garth Clayton coming up the Vicarage lane, and in another moment they would meet face to face.

Miss Cosie had not been wrong in her account of Garth's utter bewilderment the previous night, the news had simply stunned him. He had gathered up his scattered forces, and had wished them good night, and then he had gone home straight to Langley.

A sudden craving for sisterly sympathy had taken possession of him ; he must find some outlet for the bitterness that was in him. He was battling bravely with untoward circumstance, but this fresh misfortune that had overtaken him had deprived him temporarily of all courage. That the sweetness of the hope within him should be so utterly quenched ! oh, it was hard, terribly hard.

Langley looked up a little startled as he threw himself into his easy-chair. The old care-worn expression had returned again, he looked pale and moody.

“Is there anything wrong ; is it about Harry ?” she faltered, for the poor soul had been occupied

that evening with her own troubles, and was full of fears that needed tranquillizing.

"Wrong! oh, no! Won't you sit down and write a note of congratulation to Miss Marriott; and won't you say something very nice and kind from us both, Langley? One does not come into a fortune every day, and of course she would wish to be congratulated," and then with a sort of enforced quietness he told her all that he had lately heard at the Vicarage; and when he had finished Langley's face wore a look of great perplexity.

"Stop a minute, Garth. I don't think I quite understand. Are you sure that you have told me rightly; that Mr. Calcott has left all his money to Miss Marriott, and that she and Emmie are rich, and have secretly lent us all this money?"

"Emmie knows nothing about it. I am sure I told you that," impatiently.

"Ah, she has kept it even from her. Well, perhaps that was wisest under the circumstances; and in her goodness of heart she had made herself your creditor. Yes, I understand; it is

very strange. I cannot half believe it, but I think it is good news and need not make you unhappy."

"Is that all you have to say about it?" with renewed bitterness.

"Oh, no; I have a great deal to say about it. I am very fond of Miss Marriott; I like her better every day. I hope you do not mean to be angry with her about this."

Then he was silent.

"I almost wish she had confided in us from the first," went on Langley, thoughtfully. "All disguises are perilous, however well-intentioned; but she has planned this loan with the utmost delicacy and consideration for your feelings. As far as we are concerned she has behaved with the truest generosity; I think you must own that yourself."

"Truth is better than generosity," he answered gloomily.

"I never knew any one so thoroughly frank and honest," returned his sister, eager to take up the defence of her favorite, but conscious of the increasing gloom of his face. "I do

think in these sort of matters you are a little hard."

Then his bitterness overflowed and burst forth.

"Look here, Langley, I am not a bit hard. I have not a word to say against Miss Marriott; in my opinion she has not perhaps adopted the wisest course. I hate all make-believes and mysteries, even if they are in a good cause, and I think with you that it would have been far better for her to have told us all about it; but that's not the question. The main point is, that I have gone and made a fool of myself, and it is all no use."

Langley lifted her quiet eyes to his face, but she only smiled a little at his excitement.

"Oh! it is no use your looking at me like that. You don't believe what I say, but it is true for all that. Haven't I made a fool of myself, and lost my heart to her, and given up Dora for her, and made no end of plans for myself? and now this act of hers has sundered us completely."

"Why so, dear Garth, when you know as well as I do that Queenie Marriott has grown to care

for you ?” and Langley’s voice was very sweet in her brother’s ears as she said this.

“Ah, she is young, she will get over that,” but he shuddered slightly at the sound of his own words. “I have not spoken to her. I have been careful not to compromise her in the least, remember that, Langley. I am not to blame if she have discovered things for herself.”

“But why put yourself to the needless pain of saying all this when you care for each other, and must surely, by the leading of a kind Providence, come together in the end.”

“Is there a Providence in such cases ?” he retorted bitterly. “I thought people often met too late, or took wrong turnings in life ; half these affairs end crookedly.”

“But not yours, my dear brother,” her cheek turning pale at this chance allusion. How often, poor woman, a blow was drawn at a venture and wounded her in this random way.

“Yes ; mine. Why not ? Am I better than other people ? Just look at the bearings of my case : here I am, involved in debt and difficulty, with years of hard work and harass before me,

fighting inch by inch for independence ; what if I do care for this girl ?" his voice softening in spite of himself. " Do you think I am such a mean, poor-spirited fellow that I should throw myself and my poverty and my family claims at her feet, and ask her to take me in spite of it all, and endow me with her riches ? "

" If she loves you her riches need be no obstacle to either of you," she returned firmly.

" Well, perhaps not, in your view of the case ; I have hardly made up my mind about that. But what of this debt, Langley ? do you think I shall know peace until I have wiped it off ? To be a debtor to a woman, and, worse than that, to the woman I love ; is it within the limits of possibility that I can entertain the thoughts at which you still hint until I have at least paid back to her every farthing of this money ? "

" And how long will it take you to do that ? "

" Two years, at the present rate of things ; at the very best a year and a half ? "

" Two years of suspense. Oh, Garth, how cruel ! "

" Cruel to act like an honest man, and not

take advantage of a simple, inexperienced girl? What does she know of life and men?” he went on; “has she ever seen any worthy of her interest? For shame, Langley! you are thinking more of me than of her; you are not her best friend by any means. Let her leave us, let her quit Hepshaw, and assume her proper station; let her have the opportunity of judging us fairly, and comparing us with others. How do you or I know that she will not meet with some one far more worthy of her than ever I shall be?”

“Garth, my dear brother, this is truly generous; but I know Queenie, she will stand your test, hard as it is, but she will suffer terribly.”

“She will not suffer as much as I, who am sending her from me. Do you think it is no suffering to have to alienate her by a coldness I must assume, for her good as well as mine? Do I not know her? am I blind or without feeling? If I were to say to her, ‘I am poor, but I love you; will you take pity on me?’ I am sure—yes, I am sure of what her answer would be; but, as I am an honest man, I will not take such mean advantage of her.”

"Is this your final decision, Garth—to leave her free for two years?"

"Yes, it is," he replied slowly, but his face was pale, and he frowned heavily as he spoke. "It must be two years, I am sure of that, and then I will not speak to her unless I see my way clear before me. And now we had better finish with this, it is somehow getting too painful for me; I suppose I may trust to you not to betray me?"

"I must not give her a hint of your real intentions?" rather pleadingly.

"Of course not," he returned sternly, "that would undo the good and purpose of my sacrifice—to leave her freedom and scope for choice. Promise me you will do nothing of the kind, Langley."

"Oh, I will promise to do and say nothing of which you would not approve," she answered meekly. Not for worlds would she add to his trouble by even hinting that she was sorry for his decision, and thought his generosity overstrained. She knew well what he must be enduring, and all the length and breadth and depth of that great pain; but as she leant over

him, silently smoothing out with her fingers the lines and furrows of his forehead, and thinking what she might say to comfort him, he suddenly drew her towards him, and kissed her twice very hurriedly, and then got up with a sort of groan and left the room.

CHAPTER X.

"HAVE YOU NOTHING TO SAY TO ME?"

"Yet a princely man!—


If hard to me, heroic for himself!"

Mrs. Browning's 'Aurora Leigh.'

WHEN Queenie saw Garth coming towards her she shrank back for a moment in natural trepidation and some little dismay, the meeting was so utterly unexpected; but her self-possession soon returned. "It is better to get it over," she said to herself, "and to know the worst at once."

They shook hands without looking at each other, and then Garth turned back and walked by her side in silence. Neither knew exactly how to begin the conversation.

Garth was the more nervous of the two; he had passed a sleepless night, and his condition of mind was truly wretched. The bitter impulse that



had led him to unburthen his mind to his sister had by this time passed away, but his resolve was still unaltered. As he lay awake in his restlessness he argued the whole matter with himself; pride, and a certain stubbornness of will, may have had a voice in his decision, but the more he thought about it the less he felt that he could take advantage of the girl's evident affection and secure her wealth for himself.

"How can I do this mean thing?" he repeated again and again to himself. "Even if Langley be right, and she has grown to care for me, it may be only temporary, and she has seen no one else. Ought we not to urge her rather to leave Hepshaw and take her proper position in the world? It may be a dangerous test perhaps, as Langley says, and it may end in my losing her altogether, for how can I give her her freedom and expect her to be faithful? but at least my conscience will be clear." And then he swore to himself that, as far as he was concerned, he would not coerce her movements. If she went his judgment would applaud her resolution; if she stayed his trouble would be a hard thing to bear, for he must then

wrap himself up in reserve and coldness, and this would be difficult to him. "She cannot really misunderstand me, the thing is too evident," he said, striving to comfort himself. And indeed he was not without some interior consolation; his very self-sacrifice and unselfishness, constrained and unnecessary as they might appear to others, gave him a certain feeling of strength and security. His conscience was clear, his independence assured and well-defined, while somewhere, deep down in some hidden recess, lay a secret hope of Queenie's steadfastness and fealty. Langley's words still rang sweetly in his ears: "She will stand the test, severe as it is, but she will suffer terribly." Ah! well, would he not suffer too?

But this meeting was painful to him. What was he to say to her? and how was he to bring himself to speak of what was in his mind without betraying his hidden trouble, and perhaps hurting her feelings?

"Were you going to see Langley?" he asked, just when the silence was becoming embarrassing.

"Yes; is she at home?" returned Queenie

venturing to raise her eyes, and then becoming conscious all at once of Garth's paleness, and evident constraint of manner.

"She was sitting at her needlework when I left her just now, and was lamenting that Cathy was not there to help her. I think we miss Cathy more and more every day."

"I know I do," sighed Queenie, and there came over her a sudden yearning to unbosom herself to this faithful friend. Langley was good to her, but she was not Cathy.

Garth echoed the sigh, but scarcely for the same reason. Cathy's warm-hearted sympathy would not have helped him.

"I have just left Miss Cosie. Mr. Clayton, have you nothing to say to me, nothing special, I mean?" Queenie was growing desperate, while Garth was secretly marvelling at her boldness. His paleness and changed looks filled her with dismay. "I think you must have something to say to me," with a little sharpness in her voice.

That roused him in a moment.

"Yes; of course we have a great deal to say to you, Miss Marriott. I told Langley last

night that she ought to write to you. I need hardly tell you, I suppose, that you have our warmest congratulations on your good fortune?"

"I don't think I care much about congratulations."

"Nevertheless, you must put up with them," with a faint smile. "You must pay the penalty of being a rich woman."

"Were you very much surprised?" looking him full in the face; but he did not return her glance.

"I am afraid I must own to a very fair amount of astonishment; such a romantic story has never before been told in Hepshaw. It savours a little of Hans Andersen."

"Ah, I know you think me silly, and all that," she replied, in a voice that was at the same time proud and pained. "I shall never be able to make any of you understand why I did it. I begin to see a grave ending to my little joke; and yet it made me so happy."

"I almost wish you had told us from the beginning."

"That would have spoiled everything. You

and Mr. Logan would have made me resign my school at once, and my pleasant summer holiday would have been at an end. Perhaps it was cowardly ; but I could not bear being rich."

"That sounds strange."

"Ah, but it is true," she returned earnestly. "Such a little would have contented me ; five hundred a-year would have made me a happy woman ; I told Mr. Logan so. We would have taken a cottage, Emmie and I, larger and prettier than the one we are in, and we should have been as happy as the day is long ; but now, what am I to do with it all ?" putting out her hands with a sudden gesture of repugnance and helplessness.

He seemed struck with that, and hesitated for a moment before he answered her ; there was a certain forlornness in her words and aspect that touched him. They had reached the end of the lane ; but now he made a movement as though to retrace his steps, and she turned obediently and walked on again by his side. As she did so he stole a swift glance at her. Did she look any different in his eyes now she was an heiress ? His survey took in the tall, slim figure in the simple black

dress. That was the hat, surely, to which Dora had objected, and yet how well it suited her. He noted all the little details—the indescribable air of finish that had always pleased his fastidiousness, the set and poise of the pretty head, the mixture of girlish frankness and modesty that gave such a charm to her manner; and then again that inward voice made itself heard. “Oh, if she were only poor, and I dared speak to her!” and the struggle within him gave a little hardness to his voice.

“I think you ought to look at it in quite another light,” he began gravely. “It is a great responsibility that has come to you, a talent for which you must account. I don’t think you ought to hide it under a bushel in the way you are doing.”

“You mean that Mr. Logan must find another mistress? Brierwood Cottage ought to have another tenant?” she returned huskily, speaking out her greatest fear.

“I certainly do mean something of the kind; but there will be plenty of time to discuss that. You cannot decide on your future plans without

a good deal of consideration. At present I have something else to say, something for which I wish I could find adequate words. I don't know," stammering and hesitating, "how I am to thank you for your goodness, your generosity—"

"Mr. Clayton," stopping him, "will you do me one favor?"

"What is that?"

"I know what you are going to say, please let it be unsaid."

"But that is impossible."

"It need not be impossible. Why should there be any talk of such things between us?"

"Because it is right that there should be such talk. Do you think that I am to say nothing at all about my gratitude?"

"Not to me," raising her eyes with a pleading look in them that he found difficult to resist. "If we talk of gratitude you know it is I that am your debtor. Have you forgotten how good you were to us when we were poor and friendless?"

"I have forgotten nothing," he returned,

hastily ; "but, all the same, you must let me speak. I am largely in your debt, Miss Marriott, and for what is to me a very serious sum ; but I do hope that in less than two years' time I may be able to repay both interest and capital."

"As you will," she replied carelessly, but he saw that she was much hurt. What could this paltry sum matter to her ? Could he not understand how great had been the privilege of helping him ?

"You must try to comprehend how we business men feel about such things," he said gently to her, for there were tears in her eyes, and her face was averted from him. "It is too late now, but I wish you had given me the option of accepting or refusing the loan."

"How could I, when I knew you would have refused it from me ?" walking on quickly as though afraid of her emotion.

"If I had my refusal would not have hurt you, I would have made you understand my feelings so thoroughly ; but of course it is too late to talk about that now. I suppose I am very proud, but I cannot bear the thought of this

debt being between us ; all my life I have had such a horror of this sort of difficulty and being beholden to any one."

"How can you, how can you be so proud with me?" burst forth from her lips. "Do you mean that this—this trifling act of kindness will come between us and hinder us from being friends?"

"We must always be friends, I think," he returned, still more gently, for he saw how sorely he was hurting her. "Why should you say such things? you are vexed with me or you would not say them. I wish I could make you understand how truly grateful Langley and I am."

"Langley will not talk to me about principal and interest," she retorted with a little flash of indignation, "and—and I could not have believed that you would have done it."

"Come, come, I cannot have you vexed with me like this," he said, stopping her and taking her hand. "You know I must go directly, and I have wasted ever so much time already. Won't you promise me to think better of it, and not be hurt with me any longer?"

"I don't know," looking down, for his voice was rather too persuasive in its eloquence.

"You know very well, do you not, that I would not say or do anything to hurt you really? but my position is a difficult one. I don't think I ever before realized how difficult it was. Things seem all in a tangle somehow, and it is out of my power to right them."

"Why?" she asked timidly, and her brief indignation died away. Something in his manner reassured her; he had not really turned against her.

"That is just what I cannot tell you. My affairs have all got crooked, and there is no shaping them. I suppose time and patience are needed, but there's terribly hard work before me. I don't want to lose heart over it. I could not bear you just now to say what you did."

"About not being friends?"

"Yes; whatever happens we must be friends, dear friends, always. I think you might promise me as much as that."

"I do promise you that," she said, looking straight at him; and the expression in her eyes

haunted him long afterwards, it was so frank and sorrowful.

"Then I am content," he replied, and then almost abruptly he lifted his hat and moved away. Had she understood him? Could she follow the meaning of those vague words? Had she comprehended that it was only friendship for which he asked, and with which he professed himself content? He could not make up his mind how far she had understood him.

He would have been almost aghast at his success if he could have read Queenie's thoughts as she went down the lane again, and strove with a sick heart to piece together the fragments of talk in her memory.

How gentle he had been with her, and yet his very gentleness had been inexorable. Alas! she saw but too plainly that her riches and that miserable debt were dividing them. The pride and independence of the man rose between them like a wall of rock.

"He loves me, but he never means to tell me so," she said to herself in unutterable bitterness. "He will break both our hearts first."

As she entered the drawing-room at Church-Stile House Langley put down her work with a pleasant smile and word of greeting.

"Have you come to be congratulated, my dear?" she said, taking the girl in her arms, and kissing her with more than usual affection.

Queenie suffered the caress passively, and then sat down by the fire, shivering slightly as though she were cold.

"You have given us all a great surprise."

"Have I?"

"I was so startled when Garth told me last night that I could hardly take in the sense of his words. To think that it is you, and not Mr. Logan, who has been our secret benefactor!"

"Don't, Langley; I feel as though I could not talk about it."

"Will you let me talk about it instead, dear Queenie; I feel as though I can never love you enough for what you have done for us, and Cathy will feel the same; it was such true friendship. Ted was here just now singing your praises, I wish you could have heard him."

Queenie only sighed. What was all this to her if Garth and she were divided.

The heaviness of her aspect moved Langley to compassion. What could have happened to have quenched her brightness so entirely.

"Have you seen Garth?" she asked, taking up her work again, and pretending not to notice her companion; a dull red flushed the girl's face from cheek to brow at the question.

"Yes; I met him just now."

"He feels very much about all this."

"Does he?" looking at the fire.

"You must not misunderstand him if he feels the weight of his gratitude rather a heavy burden just now, he has been sorely tried, poor fellow; and then men think so differently about these sort of things."

"There is no need for you to make excuses for him," speaking with difficulty, "he was very kind, and took great pains to show me he was grateful. Ah! if he only knew how I hate that word," with a little burst of excitement.

Langley was silent; she understood too well the nature of the wound that had been received.

And then what was she to say that would in any degree comfort her ?

"I have done nothing deserving of the word," went on Queenie vehemently. "I have given what literally has cost me nothing ; it was such a privilege and happiness to help you all."

"Yes, dear ; I quite understand."

"I could scarcely sleep for happiness, and now it all seems spoiled somehow. I have grown to loathe my riches, and yet I was disposed to love them ; they hang like a millstone round my neck. I must give up my school now, and then I suppose Emmie and I must go away."

"For shame ! I will not have you talk in this miserable fashion."

"Where is it rich people are expected to live ? Caleb wanted me to take a great house in Carlisle, and visit the Dean, and all the great folk in the Close. Fancy Emmie and I visiting at the Deanery !" and the girl laughed half hysterically ; "would any of you come over and see me then, I wonder ?"

"Wait and see," returned Langley with a quiet smile. "Once friends always friends, that's the

Clayton motto. Have you really made any plans about your future, Queenie?"

"No, I have made no plans," she answered drearily; "there is plenty of time for that. I don't mean to leave Hepshaw yet, unless you all drive me away. I think I will go home now, Langley; I am not quite myself, and all this talk troubles me. I think I will go back to Emmie." And then Langley again took her in her arms, and kissed her and let her go; she could find no words with which to comfort her, and indeed the girl was very sore at heart.

When she entered her own little parlor she found Emmie lying on the rug in the firelight, in a listless fashion that was habitual with her now. She crept up from the ground rather slowly when she saw her sister; but for once the child's lassitude and evident weakness escaped her notice.

"How late you are, Queen!"

"Yes, dear, very late; I have been sitting with Miss Cosie, and then with Langley."

"Did you get the stuff for little Janie? How tired you look; and how cold your hands are!"

as Queenie knelt down mechanically and warmed them over the blaze. "I was just feeling very dull, and wishing that you would come in. I have such dull, stupid thoughts sometimes."

"You shall tell me about them presently," returned her sister hastily; "I want to speak to you now. Emmie, I have often told you stories, some of them very sad, and that made you cry; but I have a real story to tell you to-night."

"Oh, not a sad one, Queen."

"Why not, my sweet?"

"I could not bear it to-night," answered the child with a shiver; "I have been seeing pictures in the fire, and they are all the same thing—sad, every one of them; and when I go to sleep at night I always dream of Alice and little Nan, and think I am with them. I have woke up and cried often lately to think what you would do if it were true, and I were obliged to leave you."

"Oh, Emmie, for pity's sake, hush! I have had as much as I can bear to-day."

"And then I ask God to let me stop a little longer, because I am sure that you would be so

lonely without me, unless—" and here the childish face wore a wistful expression. "I wish I were not so young, and then, perhaps, I might help you."

"My darling," not understanding her in the least, "you always help me! You are the blessing of my life, and I could not do without you at all. Hush! I will not have any more of this," as Emmie seemed inclined to interrupt her. "You must listen to my story first, it is very interesting and exciting, and is all about Uncle Andrew." And then she narrated to her breathless auditor the whole history of the will, and her whim and all its consequences. "There," she said as she finished, and speaking with an attempt at cheerfulness, "isn't that the nicest fairy story I have ever told you?"

"I don't know," returned the child doubtfully. "It is very wonderful, and I do love Uncle Andrew very dearly for leaving you all the money; but I don't like being so terribly rich, Queenie."

"No, darling; no more do I."

"It was a lovely thought of yours, lending them that money; and it was dear of you to let

me have my wish, and for us two to live in this cottage. We shall never be so happy anywhere else, Queen."

"Oh, Emmie, I know that too well!" And then, to her own distress and the child's, she suddenly broke down and burst into a fit of weeping. "Never so happy again, little Emmie; never again!"

CHAPTER XI.

"A GOLDEN-HAIRED CIRCE."

"We cannot fight for love as men may do ;
We should be woo'd, and were not made to woo."

Shakespeare.

WHEN Garth returned from the Quarry that evening, sad and dispirited from his interview with Queenie, he found a letter waiting for him ; a messenger had brought it over from Crossgill Vicarage.

"Did you know Dora was at home again ?" Langley asked him in a little surprise.

But he answered "No," very briefly, as he opened the envelope.

A curious vexed smile hovered around his lips as he read the note, and then he handed it to his sister.

“Dear Mr. Clayton,” it began, “do you know that we have returned from our exile, and are settled at home again? Dear Flo was so well that I ventured on resisting the doctor’s orders. Doctors are such old women sometimes; so, as she was quite strong and hearty, and in boisterous spirits, and we were both getting terribly restless, I just wrote to papa and Beattie to expect us, and here we are.

“It is so delicious being at home again, and everything looks so beautiful. Beattie has been a good girl, and has kept things in tolerable order. Tell Langley, with my love, that I shall come over and see her very soon; and now I have a message for you from papa. He wants to consult you again about that troublesome bit of business, about which he talked to you in the summer. No one helps him so well, and he thinks so much of your advice; that is great praise from a man of papa’s age and experience, is it not? The girls are longing to see you; they are for ever talking about you. Beattie was always a great friend of yours, was she not? if I remember rightly, you were rather inclined to

snub poor Flo. We all have so much to tell you ; so if you will pack up your bag and come over and dine with us to-morrow, you will find your old quarters ready for you. Please do not disappoint us, the girls have set their hearts on seeing you.

"Your faithful friend,

"DORA."

"Shall you go?" asked Langley, very quietly, as she replaced the note in the envelope. "It is rather strange that she has not asked me as well."

"Mr. Cunningham did not want to consult you, you see," returned her brother, with an inscrutable smile. "Yes ; I suppose that I shall have to go ; there is no getting out of it," and then he sat down and wrote off a brief note, with the gravest possible face, and gave it himself to the messenger.

When he rose the next morning it was with a sense of having to undergo some ordeal. He had to rest his head that night under the roof of Crossgill Vicarage ; and before he sought his

pillow he might have to encounter some difficult passage of arms with Dora. It was some months since they had met, and he had still a kindly feeling for his old playmate. If friendship would satisfy her he could promise her a tolerable amount; perhaps she had taken him at his word, and there would be no attempt to draw him again under her influence; perhaps she had grown reasonable. Dora was always such a sensible creature, and had begun to understand for herself that they would be better apart. If this were so he would eat his dinner with a light heart, feeling that nothing was expected of him.

Above everything he desired that there might be peace between them; he would never willingly make her his enemy. Perhaps some suspicion that she might prove a dangerous adversary at this time crossed his mind; he had great kindness of heart also, and would have hated to disappoint or grieve any woman, especially one for whom he had once entertained a tenderness. It was with somewhat dubious feelings, therefore, that he drove himself up that evening to the Vicarage.

Dora was not as before in the porch to receive him, but the old nurse met him at the door with a pleasant smile on her wrinkled face as she led him into the hall, dusky and warm with fire-light.

"The young ladies were in the drawing-room," she told him as she helped him off with his overcoat.

Garth stood and warmed himself after his long cold drive and listened, nothing loath, to the old woman's prattle. Nurse was a great favorite of his.

There was quite a ruddy glow when the drawing-room door was opened; the soft, harmonious light of the great white china lamps pervaded the long low room. In spite of his dubious feelings Garth could not help admiring that pretty picture of domestic comfort. Dora was in her favorite carved chair working, with Flo curled up on the rug at her feet; another girlish form was half hidden in the recesses of the Vicar's great easy-chair. The white dresses of the girls quite shone in the fire-light.

As Dora advanced to meet him Garth was driven to confess to himself that he had never

seen her to such advantage. The soft velvet gown that she wore set off her golden hair and beautifully fair skin to perfection. As she gave him her hand with her prettiest smile a rose-tint, very like a dawning blush, tinged her cheeks.

"You are very good to come to us to-night," she said in the lowest possible voice. "I was half afraid you would be proud and stay away on purpose to punish me."

"Why should I wish to punish you?" he answered good-humoredly. "So these are your sisters. The question is, which is Beatrix and which is Flo?" and he shook hands with them both with a cordial word or two.

They were both taller than Dora, slim, graceful creatures. Beatrix was the handsomer of the two, with lively dark eyes and an expression of great animation. Flo was plainer, with an odd, piquante face and fair hair like Dora's, which she wore cropped and curly like a boy's.

"Poor Flo has lost all her beautiful hair," observed her sister, passing her hand regretfully over the curls. "Is she not grown? and Beattie

too? They make me look such a little thing beside them."

"Beatrix has grown such a fashionable young lady that I shall be half afraid of her," returned Garth, looking at the girl with kindly interest.

Beatrix's dark eyes shone with pleasure as she answered his smile. The two had been great friends in old times, and many a game of romps had been enacted by them in the Vicarage hall and garden. He had always cared less about Flo, who was somewhat spoiled by her sister, and was in consequence rather pert and precocious. He had ever taken a mischievous delight in snubbing her, or putting her down, as he called it; but Flo was grown up now, and wore long dresses, and had the languid air of a *ci-devant* invalid, and the snubbing must now be a thing of the past.

Garth and Beatrix had so much to say to each other that Dora at last grew dissatisfied, and bid him, with playful peremptoriness, break off his chatter and get ready for dinner. And then he took himself off rather reluctantly to the porch-

room, where he found nurse coaxing his fire to a cheerful blaze.

"Isn't Miss Dora looking lovely to-night?" exclaimed the old woman when she caught sight of him; "for all the world like a picture, in her velvet gown. I do think she is the prettiest creature in the county."

"I think Miss Beatrix will be far handsomer," returned Garth, with a little spice of malice and contradiction in his voice. "She will play havoc with a few hearts before many years are over, take my word for it."

"Miss Beatrix!" in a tone of shrill scorn. "Dear heart, just to think of comparing her with our Miss Dora! But you young gentlemen will be poking your fun at an old woman. Miss Beatrix indeed!"

"My fire is burning nicely now, Nurse," observed Garth rather hastily. "If you make me too comfortable I shall be afraid of coming here."

"There's some folks would like to see you come oftener, sir; but it is not for me to tell young ladies' secrets," and then nurse dropped

her ancient curtsy and took her comely old person out of the room, while Garth, with a shrug and sigh, proceeded to dress himself.

"Oh, my golden-haired Circe!" was his inward ejaculation, and then he wondered how Queenie would look in a velvet gown with some of that fine old lace round her long white throat. "She can have no end of that sort of thing now," he said to himself.

After all the gong sounded before he was ready; but Mr. Cunningham received his excuses with good-humor, and dinner passed off with perfect tranquillity. It struck Garth that Beatrix was rather quiet and a trifle dull, and he had some difficulty in winning a look or response from her, but he soon desisted from his attempts. "Poor child, she has been having a little sisterly lecture on forwardness, I expect. Dora is not likely to allow her to monopolize me," and he bent with some secret amusement over his plate. He was reading his old friend Dora by a clearer light now.

But he soon forgot Beatrix when Dora began to talk in earnest. Dora was very brilliant and

picturesque in her conversation when she chose. She gave Garth full descriptions of their places of sojourn in the Pyrenees. Now and then there were hints and touches of a softer character: had he thought of her spending long anxious days and nights in that great white-washed ward in Brussels? why had he answered her letters so curtly, exiles were always so homesick and longing for news? did he remember her and Flo eating their solitary Christmas dinner in their odd little room, looking out on the snow-capped mountains. They had chestnut soup, and a broiled fowl, and a salad to follow, and Flo was longing all the time for a slice of turkey and some English plum-pudding, and he had never taken the trouble to tell her how they had passed the day at Church-Stile House, and so on.

It was all very graphic and interesting, and Garth took himself to task for a certain feeling of relief when Dora and her sisters had withdrawn, and the Vicar and he had plunged into their business talk.

He was half disposed to prolong it when the coffee was brought in, but, to his surprise, Flo

made her appearance. "Dora has sent me to look after the fire while papa takes his nap," remarked Flo very coolly, as she produced her knitting and planted herself comfortably on the rug. "Papa has had rheumatism very badly, and if the fire goes out and he wakes up chilly there is no knowing what will happen," finished Flo, with a toss of her curly head that reminded him of Dora.

"My girls spoil me dreadfully," observed Mr. Cunningham fondly. "Don't let me keep you, Garth, we shall be in to tea presently," and there was nothing but for Garth to withdraw.

But his heart quailed within him when he entered the drawing-room, and found Dora seated alone by the fire, apparently doing nothing but toying with a little screen.

"What has become of Beatrix?" he asked at once, stopping half way and looking round for his favorite.

"Beattie has a letter that she must finish to-night, and will be down presently," returned Dora carelessly; "she is writing in the old school-room. You remember the school-room, do you

not, and the cosy teas we have had there? we still keep it for the girls' use. I must get papa to do it up prettily for them next summer."

"Couldn't she have left her letter until to-morrow?" asked Garth, half laughing, but the little subterfuge secretly displeased him. Why should his favorite be banished to that dreary schoolroom? and why should Flo be set to watch her father's slumbers? "I don't like the look of this at all," he muttered to himself, and again that allusion to Circe crossed his mind.

"Come and sit down," exclaimed Dora, with playful petulance. "Never mind Beattie's whim, girls will have their own way, and she does not mean to be rude; and now tell me, sir, why you have been so cool all this time, and treated me so shabbily?"

He was in for it now he saw, but he feigned to misunderstand her.

"How have I treated you shabbily?" he asked, with a tolerable assumption of innocence.

There was an ominous flash in Dora's blue eyes, but she answered him gently and plaintively.

"Why, in your letters, to be sure; they were as brief and cold as possible, not a trace of the old friendship, not even a regret at my long absence. They deserved to be burnt, every one of them, but I hadn't the heart," dropping her voice and looking at him with dangerous sweetness.

"I wish you had," he returned coolly, for he was in no mood for this sort of thing. Another time all this might have pleased and allured him; he might have been faithful in his allegiance to Queenie, and yet have taken a certain pleasure in watching her and listening to her reproaches. She was such a picturesque little creature, and there was something so sweetly seductive in her manners to him, that he would not have been a man and not felt the power of her fascination; but the memory of his past tenderness for her was now a source of regret to him, and he was too much shattered by the storm that had swept over him to amuse himself with aimless love-making. "I wish you would destroy all my letters, Miss Cunningham," he went on, gravely; and then he remembered that he

had not yet told her about the failure of his fortunes.

He touched on it now, but lightly, and she listened with the deepest interest.

"Poor Mr. Clayton, how shocking to lose all that money! I am so grieved about it, and you never told me about that either!" with reproachful tenderness, and the mistiness he had before noticed gathered slowly to her eyes.

"There is something else I have not told you," he continued, taking his resolution suddenly, and determined to put a stop, at all risks, to this dangerous softness; "but then, to be sure, I have only just known it myself. Have you heard that our school-mistress, Miss Marriott, has come into a large fortune?"

"Why no!" she returned, very much startled and becoming a little pale.

"It is a whim of hers hiding it from all of us as she has done. Why, she was a rich woman when you first made her acquaintance! I call it a tidy little fortune, five thousand a-year."

"Why has she hidden it? What has been her purpose?" she inquired, with a sudden sharpness

in her tone that struck him directly, but he answered her carelessly.

“Oh, I don’t know ; some girlish nonsense or other, nothing at all to her discredit, rather the otherwise.” But he said no word about the loan. It was no business of Dora’s ; it was a matter simply between themselves, so he told himself.

But Dora’s cheek had paled visibly. “I thought you hated money and heiresses,” she said at last, very slowly, and looking him full in the face.

Garth flushed uneasily, the inference was too obvious.

“Did I say a word about hating or the reverse, Dora ?” he asked, in some displeasure. In his vexation he had called her Dora.

“I feared you had made up your mind never to call me that again,” she said, looking at him very gently. “I have thought since,” hesitating and dropping her eyes, “that I was wrong and foolish in what I said to you that night, and you were perfectly right in being angry with me. Couldn’t you—haven’t you forgiven me yet, Mr. Garth ?”

Then he jumped up from his seat, and his face was full of pain. She was still his old friend and playmate, and how was he to misunderstand her? Was it forgiveness only for which she was asking, or was it a tacit permission for a renewal of his attentions? Either way, he must set things right between them now and for ever, for her sake, for his, and for Queenie's.

"Why are you so hard to me?" she asked again, and her blue eyes were still misty.

"Dora, my dear girl," he said, and there was a certain warmth and affection in his tone, "I am not hard with you, and I have forgiven you with all my heart. Perhaps I was a little angry with you once, men are such touchy creatures; but you did a very kind and wise thing for us both that night, and I thank you for it most truly, for you have saved us both, Dora, from a very great mistake." And then he walked away from her, and took up his position by the fireplace.

Dora's pale cheeks were flaming now, but she made no attempt to answer him.

"I thought you were never coming, papa," she

said petulantly, when her father and Flo at that moment entered the room.

When Beatrix returned from her sojourn in the cold school-room she had a rebuke ready for her tardiness.

"I do not know what Mr. Clayton will think of such manners," she said rather severely ; but Beatrix only shrugged her shoulders and exchanged a droll glance with Flo.

"I am nearly starved with cold, and I should like some tea, Dorrie," she said very good-humoredly.

"I cannot have you sit in that cold school-room, my dear," observed her father ; "there was my study, or Dora's writing-table in the front drawing-room, why could you not use that ?"

"Never mind, this cup of tea will warm me," returned Beatrix, hugging herself and shivering.

Garth stirred the fire unasked, and brought her a low chair, and made her have a second cup of tea, waiting on her himself.

"And in that thin dress, too!" he remonstrated ; "you ought to take better care of yourself, Beatrix."

Beatrix looked up at him half grateful and half laughing. She wished she were not grown up, and she might ask him to chafe her cold hands as he used to do when she was a little girl. She remembered even now the comforting warmth of those strong, brown hands.

"Never mind, one day he will be my brother, and that will be nice," thought Beatrix to herself. "I wish he and Dorrie would settle it quickly between themselves, and then there will be no more cold school-rooms."

Garth did not find another opportunity to exchange a word with Dora that night. The girls played some duets, and their sister turned the pages of their music for them, and left her father to entertain their visitor.

Nevertheless, the sense of her displeasure pervaded the atmosphere somehow, and drove all comfort from him. When he said good night to her, she gave him a very fleeting pressure of the fingers, and scarcely lifted her eyes to his, but her mouth looked a little scornful.

But it was not Garth this time that passed a sleepless night. When Dora brushed out her

golden hair a pale, set face met her eyes in the glass, with a very decided frown on the brow.

"He thinks to blind me, but I am not to be thrown aside in this sort of way," she said to herself. "He belongs to me, and she shall not have him." And before she slept Dora took her resolution.

CHAPTER XII

"HE BELONGS TO ME."

Lor. You loved and he did love ?

Mr. To say he did

Were to affirm what oft his eyes avouch'd,

What many an action testified, and yet

What wanted confirmation of his tongue."—*J. S. Knowles.*

A FEW days after this Queenie was returning from afternoon school when Emmie met her at the door of the cottage with her finger on her lip and a general air of mystery about her.

"What is it, Emmie ?" asked her sister somewhat wearily. "Run in out of the cold air, darling, it is making you cough, I see."

"Why is it so dreadfully cold, I wonder ?" returned the child shivering. "The winter is over, and yet the wind seems to blow right through one. Who do you think is in there,

Queen ? actually Miss Cunningham. She has been sitting there nearly an hour, I believe."

"Miss Cunningham !" unable to believe her ears ; for Langley, with intentional kindness, had not informed her of her return.

"Yes ; Miss Cunningham. Oh !" dropping her voice to a whisper, "she has tired me so. She is nice and pretty, and has blue eyes like our kitten's ; but somehow I can't like her. She asked me such lots of questions all about Uncle Andrew and our being rich ; but, do you know, I don't think she quite liked your lending Mr. Garth that money."

"Oh, Emmie, you never told her that ?" in such a horrified voice that the child looked frightened.

"Was it such a great secret ? I didn't know you would mind," faltered Emmie ; "and she was saying such nice things about Mr. Garth."

"Yes, it was a secret," returned Queenie more calmly. "Don't you remember we are not to let 'our left hand know what our right hand doeth' ? But never mind, it is done now," for Emmie's eyes were already filling with tears at the notion of Queenie's displeasure. "Run and

tell Patience to have her kettle boiling ; I dare say Miss Cunningham will like some tea."

"May I stay and help Patience ? there are some muffins, and I meant to toast them myself," and, as Queenie nodded assent, Emmie stole down the little passage noiselessly and shut herself up safely with Patience.

As Queenie walked into the room very erect and open-eyed she did not fail to notice that Miss Cunningham had already made herself at home. Her sealskin jacket lay on the chair beside her, and her little furred gauntlets also. Her golden hair shone under her beaver hat ; the dark close-fitting dress suited her to a nicety. But as she came forward, holding out her hand, it struck Queenie that she looked somewhat pale, and that her smile was a little forced.

"What an age you have been," observed Dora lightly. "I have been sitting with Emmie nearly an hour I believe. I thought you were never coming in, and then my long drive would have been in vain. I suppose Langley told you of my return home ?"

"No ; I was not aware of it," rejoined Queenie ;

and now she felt a little surprise at Langley's omission.

Dora's delicate eyebrows arched themselves slightly.

"How very strange! and her brother was dining with us last week. He was our first visitor, of course," with a meaning emphasis. "The girls are so fond of him, and papa can do nothing without him, which makes it very pleasant for me. By-the-bye," her manner changing abruptly, "Mr. Clayton tells me that you have been only playing at schoolmistress all this time, Miss Marriott, and that you are in reality a woman of fortune."

"Mr. Calcott has been good to me and left me all his money. I was poor, very poor, when I met you first," her heart sinking strangely at Dora's words. Why had she begun to talk of Garth?

"When people do eccentric things they must expect to have all sorts of motives imputed to them. What will the world say, by-the-way, of your lending all that money to Mr. Clayton?" fixing her eyes a little too keenly on Queenie's face.

"It may say what it likes," with the proudest possible manner, for she felt her spirit rising at this. What did it matter what the whole world said about her conduct, if only her conscience were clear? "The world does not believe in a disinterested friendship," a faint color coming into her face; "it would sneer at such an improbability."

"I generally find the world is right," returned Dora, with aggravating calmness. "Of course it will say you are in love with Mr. Clayton, you are prepared for that, Miss Marriott."

A painful blush overspread the girl's face.

"Oh, this is too bad," she exclaimed, clasping her hands nervously. "Cannot one do a little kindness in return for so much without having unworthy motives imputed to one? Why do you come and say such things to me?" turning on her tormentor with sudden anger and impatience. "It is no business of yours; it is nothing to you if people will say untrue things of me."

"You are quite wrong there; it is my business," returned Dora quietly. She did not like

her work, but, all the same, she must go through with it. "It is just this—that is my business," she repeated, and her face looked worn and irritable in the firelight. "Miss Marriott, you must know—you cannot have been so much with Langley and Cathy and not know that Garth Clayton and I belong to each other."

Then a sudden coldness crept over Queenie.

"You—you are not engaged to him," she said at length, and her voice sounded strange to herself; the horror of such an announcement almost took her breath away. "But it could not be true!" she said to herself, "it could not be true!"

"It is my own fault that we are not engaged," returned Dora, speaking in a tone of plaintive regret. "I have put him off time after time, and would not allow him to settle it; the girls were too young, and I could not leave papa, that was what I told him. Why, just before I went to Brussels last autumn he came to us, and wanted me then to settle it, poor fellow, and I would not listen to him."

"He spoke to you, then?" the numbness creeping over her again.

"Yes ; he said it must be yea, yea, or nay, nay, between us, I remember his words quite well ; and when I would not give him a positive answer he got angry and left me. He has never been himself with me since, and has made me, oh, so unhappy ; but I know the reason for it now, Miss Marriott," fixing her blue eyes piteously on her. "Why have you come between us and tried to steal away his heart from poor me ?"

"Miss Cunningham !" her cheeks burning at the accusation.

"Why have you lent him all that money, and tried to decoy his affections ? He is not the same to me, and you are the cause. We are two women, and he cannot marry us both ; and—and he belongs to me," finished Dora, with a genuine quiver in her voice.

Poor bewildered Queenie could make nothing of it.

"He cannot belong to you if you are not engaged, and if you have sent him from you," she said, looking helplessly at Dora ; and indeed she was so heartsick and stupefied that she hardly knew what she said. If he had spoken to Dora,

as she averred, how could he have come and looked at her the next night in the way he did, when she knelt on the rug, with the plate of cakes in her hand, in the gloaming ?

"It was duty, not I, that sent him away, he owns that," returned Dora, sighing, but her conscience smote her as she uttered this little fib.

Had he not striven to show her that her motives of duty had been overstrained and false in his eyes ? "If you send me away you may find it difficult to recall me, Dora," he had said to her. Was not that asserting his right to be free ?

"I went too far that time," she went on, "and made him angry and bitter ; but that would not have mattered if you had not come between us."

"I—I have done nothing. What do you mean ?"

"He was angry with me, and then he came to you ; and, to be sure, how can he help seeing that you care for him after all you have done ?"

"Hush ! I will not hear another word ; you are going too far. How dare you ?" exclaimed Queenie passionately, moved to sudden anger at this un-

generous thrust. "You have no right to come here and say these things to me."

"No right!" returned Dora meekly; she had quailed a little before the brown fire of Queenie's eyes. "Have I no right when I have known and cared for him all my life? I am nearly eight-and-twenty now, and I was not more than sixteen—Flo's age—when this was first thought of between us; why, we had been meant for each other ever since we were children, and yet, after twelve years of thorough understanding, you say I have no right to speak!"

"I—I do not understand," began Queenie vaguely, and her cheek turned very white.

What if all this were true, and he had grown weary of this youthful entanglement? Might it not be possible that he and Dora had grown apart, that the tie had loosened between them, and that, in reality, his second love was the true one? Alas! the instincts of her own pure heart verified this view of the case; she understood him so thoroughly, she was so sure of his integrity, but what proof or evidence of her belief could she offer Dora? He had never spoken to

her, his looks indeed had betrayed his secret, and hitherto their eloquence had sufficed her ; but, at a crisis like this, the sense of his silence was dreadful ; her faith was involuntarily built up on no foundation. After all Dora was right, and she had no claim to him.

"I was sure you did not understand," returned Dora, watching her, and speaking with the utmost gentleness. "You are too generous to take him from me, who have loved him all these years. I knew I had only to speak to you and all would be right between us."

"Stop!" exclaimed Queenie in an unnatural voice. "You may be mistaken, Mr. Clayton has never spoken to me, it may not be as you think ; but, on the other hand," growing whiter still, "I would scorn to deceive you, and I have thought — but I may be wrong — that he has seemed to care for me. I would not have said so much, but you have more than once hinted of my forwardness."

"Yes ; but it has been only seeming," replied Dora softly ; "he could not really have changed to me, you know. If you would only go away and

leave us to come together it would soon be right again."

"You want me to go away?" asked Queenie slowly.

"Not for long—only for a few months, till he has got over his fancy, and come back to me. I don't want to hurt you, dear Miss Marriott, or to make you angry again, but if you knew how soon men find out these sort of things! Of course you thought it was gratitude and friendship, but he was wiser, and knew better than that; and when I made him angry he thought it very likely that you would console him."

"You have said enough," replied Queenie in the same constrained tone. "You will not have long to bear with my presence; I have already made up my mind not to remain in Hepshaw."

"And when shall you leave?" asked Dora eagerly.

"I—I don't know; in another month or two. I suppose there is nothing to keep me here now."

But this vague promise was not sufficient for Dora.

"Why do you not go at once?" she persisted.

"You will think I am in a hurry to get rid of you, but that is not the only reason," hesitating.

She was deliberately breaking Queenie's heart, and she knew it, in spite of the girl's assumed quietness ; but somehow she shrank from imposing this fresh pain.

"Surely, my dear Miss Marriott, now that you have nothing to bind you here you will not think of exposing that delicate little sister of yours to our March winds?"

"What do you mean?" asked Queenie sharply, "you are talking about yourself, not Emmie. What has Emmie to do with it," shivering again as though some cold air had passed over her. And, strange to say, Dora grew suddenly soft-hearted over the effect of her words, for had she not a young sister too, and had not Flo been given back to her from the very grave itself?

"I wish you would not look so unhappy," she went on. "I have not seen her for some months, and of course the change struck me, growing children often look thin; and then she is still weak from that long illness. Why don't you ask Dr. Stewart about her, he will tell you

what to do ; but of course you have had some advice ? ”

“ I have had no advice. Emmie is not ill. Why do you come here to make me so miserable ? ” returned Queenie, fixing her large eyes on her with such a mournful expression that Dora got quite uncomfortable.

“ She only wants a tonic perhaps, but I should speak to Dr. Stewart ; and, indeed, a cold spring would be very bad for her,” repeated Dora, earnestly, as she drew on her furred gloves. Her conscience was very uncomfortable as she stood smoothing down the soft sealskin, trying to find some word that she might say at parting.

Queenie did not help her. She watched her with grave unsmiling eyes as Dora made her little preparations. When Dora again held out her hand to her she touched it rather reluctantly.

“ Good-bye ; I hope you will not bear me malice, Miss Marriott.”

“ I never bear any one malice ; but you have made me very unhappy about Emmie,” returned Queenie, but her voice was quite steady as she

spoke. What if her heart were breaking within her, Dora should never know it.

But when the door closed upon her visitor, and Emmie crept softly back into the room, her fortitude suddenly gave way.

"Come to me, Emmie ; come here, my darling," and as the child obeyed her wonderingly, she held out her arms with a sudden sob.

"You are not ill, are you, Emmie ? What do they mean by making me so unhappy ? They say you are thin and weak ; but there is nothing the matter, is there ?"

"I don't know," faltered the child, resting her fair head on her sister's shoulder. "I think I am only tired, Queenie. Ought people to be so very, very tired, and to have their bones always aching ?"

"That is because you are not strong, my precious." But somehow, as Queenie uttered the words, the conviction seized on her that Dora was right, and the child was certainly thinner and lighter ; and such an intolerable feeling of agony came over her at the thought that she could not bear it.

"Oh, my darling, forgive me!" she sobbed, kissing the little pale face passionately.

"Forgive you! What do you mean? What makes you cry so bitterly, Queen?"

"Forgive me. I was too wrapped up in myself to notice. I never meant to neglect you, Emmie, never. What does my happiness or unhappiness matter if I can only keep you with me, my blessing?"

"Shall you want to keep me if I get too dreadfully tired?" she asked, languidly. "Don't cry any more, Queen, I will stop just as long as I can." But Queenie only shivered afresh and dried her eyes.

"Sit by the fire, darling," she said, trying to return to her usual manner. "Patience shall give you your tea. I shall not be very long, Emmie."

"Are you going out again?" in a disappointed tone. "The muffins are all ready, and I thought we should be so cosy this evening."

"I shall not be long," repeated her sister, hastily.

She knew she could not have swallowed food

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in her present state of suspense, and before Emmie could again remonstrate she had left the cottage, and was on the way to Juniper Lodge.

She found Dr. Stewart in his surgery. She fancied he listened a little gravely to her account.

"She has not come under my notice for the last six or seven weeks," he said, as he prepared, at Queenie's urgent request, to accompany her. "In my opinion she has always been a delicate child. Such an illness as you have described may leave its effects for years."

As they entered the parlor they found Emmie stretched on the rug as usual, and this time Queenie's heart sank within her at the sight.

"Oh, Emmie, you are not tired again?" she said, almost impatiently, for she feared that this would impress Dr. Stewart unfavorably; but he apparently took no notice. He watched the child with keen attention as she roused herself somewhat feebly, and came towards them.

"Has Queenie asked you to make me less tired?" she demanded gravely, fixing her blue eyes on his face.

"Young creatures like you ought never to be

tired," he answered cheerfully. "Do you often lie down in this fashion, eh?"

"I lie down because my bones ache, and I have such an odd, funny feeling sometimes."

And then, as Dr. Stewart questioned her jokingly about the feelings, she told him in her childish way of all manner of strange fancies and dreams that troubled her, and of the queer faintness that came over her at times; and how her cough began to hurt her; and how she got more tired and good for nothing every day.

Dr. Stewart's face grew graver as he listened. When he had finished a most careful examination of the child he sat for a little while in silence, while Queenie watched him anxiously.

"I am afraid he thinks Emmie very delicate," she said to herself. But she little knew Dr. Stewart's thoughts at that moment.

"If she had called me in earlier I could have done nothing," he thought. "The child is in a rapid decline. I wonder if it would be more merciful to tell her so at once, or to let her find it out gradually for herself?" And being a very

tender-hearted man, he inclined to the latter course.

So when Emmie had been sent away on some errand, and Queenie began her anxious questioning, he answered her evasively.

"Do you think her very ill? ought I to have sent for you before, Dr. Stewart?"

"Well, no; I don't see what I could have done. Of course the child is very delicate—in a very bad state of health I should say; she is very fanciful and morbid too, all these imaginative children are. You must rouse her and keep her cheerful."

"But was Miss Cunningham right? will the cold Spring hurt her?"

"Ah, that is just what I was going to say. I don't think our northern climate agrees with her, it is too strong and bracing. You are your own mistress, why don't you take her south? Any watering-place would do—Torquay, or Bournemouth, or even St. Leonards. The change may give her a few more months," he said to himself.

"Sea air! is that what she needs?" asked

Queenie, with a sudden dawning of hope in her face.

Dr. Stewart shifted uneasily on his seat, and did not look at her as he answered.

"Well, one should always make use of every possible remedy; and of course another month of these cold winds will kill her, there is no doubt of that."

"I will go at once; we will start immediately," almost gasped Queenie.

"I should do so by all means. If you like, I will speak to Mr. Logan on my way home, and see if he cannot, temporarily at least, fill up your place. There was a young person Faith mentioned who would be very likely to suit. Shall I manage this for you, eh?"

"I shall be greatly obliged if you will," she answered gratefully.

"Then about the place, where will you decide on going? There's a friend of mine, a doctor, a sort of connection of ours, living at St. Leonards; he and his wife are very good people. If you thought of going there I would write to Bennet, and he would look after Miss Emmie."

"I think I would rather go there, then ; it will feel less lonely if Dr. Bennet is a friend of yours," a sudden terrible sense of isolation and banishment coming over her.

"Very well, then, we will decide on St. Leonards, and I will ask them to look out some cheerful apartments for you. You are not particular about price, I dare say ; and I can rely on his wife's choice. She is a very good homely body, and will be a great comfort to you—when the child gets worse," he added to himself.

"When ought we to go ?" she asked in a low voice, feeling all at once as though Fate were too strong for her.

"Humph ! well, suppose we say in a week from now. I will talk to Mr. Logan, and I dare say we can find somebody to take the cottage off your hands. The less leave-taking and fuss the better in such a case, don't you think so, eh ?"

"If Mr. Logan releases me there will be no difficulty about anything else," she returned quietly, and Dr. Stewart was charmed with her good sense and reasonableness. She forced herself into seeming cheerfulness when the child

returned, and they sat down at last to their long-delayed meal. When they had finished she beckoned Emmie to the stool at her feet.

"Darling, are you glad?" she began. "Dr. Stewart says that I must take you away to the sea, nothing else will make you strong."

"Does he say the sea will make me strong?" asked Emmie curiously, "are you sure that he said that, Queen?"

"He said these cold winds will kill you," returned Queenie shuddering, "and that was enough for me. You will not fret at going away, Emmie, we shall be together, and do all sorts of nice things all day long; and when the summer comes, and you are strong again, we can come back here and see all our kind friends."

"I hope the summer will not be too long in coming, then," she returned dubiously. "Oh! I wish we had not to leave this dear place, it will be so sad parting with Langley and dear Mr. Garth, and Captain Fawcett, and Miss Cosie, and every one."

"Yes; but it will only be for a little time," returned her sister, persuasively, for the child's

voice was full of sadness. "Don't you remember, darling, that happy summer at Morecombe Bay, when dear father was alive, and how I helped you to erect great castles on the sand; you were such a little child then, but so strong and merry."

"I think I remember a little bit of it, and how the waves used to sing me to sleep."

"Yes; and we shall hear the grand old lullaby again. Now listen to me, Emmie, and I will tell you what we will do, you and I. We will go to a grand hotel in London,—we are rich people now, you know,—and we will send for Cathy, and make her spend a long day with us."

"Oh, that will be nice," exclaimed Emmie, clapping her hands in her old way. "And shall we have a bright sunny room with a great bow-window looking over the sea, like the rich people we noticed at Morecombe Bay? and shall we ever be able to drive out in a pony carriage?"

"I will hire the prettiest pony carriage I can find," returned Queenie, feeling now the value of riches. "You shall have everything you wish for, Emmie—books and toys, and all manner of

good things—if only you will be happy with me and not fret.”

“Of course I shall be happy with you,” exclaimed the child, throwing herself into her sister’s arms. “What was it Ruth said? ‘Whither thou goest I will go.’ I always think of you when I read that. We have been playing at being poor, and now we must play at being rich. Oh, it will be such fun!” finished Emmie rather wearily, and Queenie kissed the heavy eyes and said no more.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ WHY DOES HE NOT COME AND SEE US ? ”

“ ‘ It is not hard to die,’

She said, with that fair smile, ‘ for God’s sweet will
Makes bitter things most sweet. In my bright youth
He calls me to His side. It is not hard
To go to Him.’ ”—‘ *Ezekiel and other Poems.*’

FRIENDS came around Queenie in her trouble. In her letter to Cathy she compared herself, somewhat quaintly, to Job when all his acquaintance comforted him. For after the first few hours of stupefied misery that followed her conversation with Dr. Stewart and Dora, her natural courage had returned; the pain was crushed resolutely into the background. Her every thought must be for Emmie; her one care to retrieve the effects of her unintentional neglect.

The cottage all at once became the centre of interest to all the good Hepshaw folks

Captain Fawcett could scarcely bear the child out of his sight, and his wife's sorrow at the impending parting was a grievous thing to see ; while Miss Cosie trotted in and out perpetually, on all manner of self-invented errands.

And Langley came, saying little, but expressing a whole world of silent tenderness in her face and manner ; and Faith Stewart, with her quiet, helpful ways, bringing an atmosphere of rest and peace to poor harassed Queenie.

One day Mr. Chester came, but his visit was a sadly trying one. He wrung Queenie's hand for some moments without speaking, and for a long time he could not bring himself to mention the subject of her departure.

"You were so good to me when my darling died. I wish I could do something to help you," he said huskily ; "but then my poor Gertie is dying, and I cannot leave her for more than an hour or two," and the sympathy of this open-hearted man almost broke Queenie down.

One afternoon she went to say good-bye to Miss Charity. Miss Charity looked up at her with her bright sharp eyes very keenly.

" Ah, well, being a rich woman doesn't seem to suit you," she said, not unkindly. " You are not half as blithe and bonny-looking as when you first came to Hepshaw."

" I am so anxious about Emmie," replied Queenie, hastily, for any comment on her changed looks made her uncomfortable. " You see, Emmie is all I have, Miss Charity."

" Ah, well, the widow's mite was worth all the rich men's offerings," returned the invalid with a sigh. " Never hold what you have got with both hands, because then it is harder to let go. I thought I should have died of sheer grief when my back got bad, and poor George had to give me up ; but I thought better of it, and here I am, and here I shall be, till my lessons are all done, and I am perfect through patience," finished Miss Charity, with a tear twinkling on her eye-lashes.

But the one friend for whose coming she looked daily, for whose voice and presence and sympathy she craved with a longing that surprised herself, never crossed the threshold of the cottage.

For some reason only known to himself Garth Clayton held himself aloof.

It was not until after morning service on Sunday that Queenie found herself face to face with him in the plane-tree walk. He was with Ted and Langley, but after a moment's hesitation he left them and came up to her.

"You are leaving us, I hear," he said, rather abruptly, and Queenie could see he was exceedingly nervous, "and I am much grieved at the cause; but I have great faith in sea air. I hope—at least I trust—that Emmie may benefit by it."

"Dr. Stewart says it is the only thing for her. Have you seen him? Has he given you his opinion about her?" fixing her dark eyes rather searchingly on his face. Dr. Stewart's ambiguity was causing her some uneasiness. "I wish that he—that some one—would speak plainly to me, and tell me what he really thinks about Emmie."

"Well, you see, doctors are rather difficult people to deal with," returned Garth evasively, but his tone was very gentle. "You must not lose heart about it, you know, children are often

very ill. This cold wind is making you shiver, I must not keep you now ; I will come over to the cottage to bid you and Emmie ' good-bye,' " and then he smiled at her and went back to his sister.

Queenie had arranged to go over to Carlisle the next day to pay a parting visit to Caleb and Molly. All her affairs were now arranged ; Mr. Logan had found a temporary mistress in a young widow, a *protégée* of Faith Stewart's, who was lodging in Hepshaw with her little girl, and was in search of some employment. And Emmie, who had taken a fancy to Mrs. Henfrey's little girl, proposed that they should live in the cottage, " at least take care of it until we come back," to which Queenie, desirous of gratifying the child's most trifling whim, willingly acceded. A bitter disappointment awaited Queenie on her return from Carlisle.

" Oh, dear, you will be so sorry ! " Emmie exclaimed, running to her as she entered the parlor, feeling weary and dispirited. " Langley and Mr. Garth have been here, and he has left you a message, because he is going away and will

not see you again ; and he did seem so sorry about it."

"Going away !" repeated Queenie in a low voice, and then she sat down. She felt all at once so strangely tired.

"Yes ; I heard him tell Langley that he must take the seven o'clock train, so he has gone long ago now. Some uncle of theirs is ill, I think they said he lived at Perth ; but anyhow he sent for Mr. Garth in a great hurry."

"And what was his message, Emmie ? " putting up her hand to her head, as though conscious of some numb pain.

"Well, he told me to say how sorry he was to miss you and not to say good-bye, and that you were not to lose heart about things ; and oh—yes, he told me that twice over, that he hoped if you were in any trouble or perplexity that you would write to him or Langley, for they would do anything to help you. And he kissed me half-a-dozen times I am sure !" with a triumphant air ; "and then Langley said they must go, and he got up very slowly and went away."

"Oh, it is too hard ! it is more than I can bear !"

broke from Queenie's pale lips when she was alone with her thoughts that night. "To leave for months, for ever, perhaps, and never to wish him good-bye, not even a word or look to treasure up in my memory." And for a long time she wept bitterly.

But by-and-bye she became more reasonable. "It is wrong of me, I ought not to wish to see him if he belongs to Dora. Perhaps it is better so, after all." But, nevertheless, the bitterness of that disappointment abided with her for many a long day.

When Langley wrote to her brother she spoke very briefly of the leave-taking. "Ted and I saw them off, and Mr. Logan was with us. Emmie clung to us and cried a good deal, but Miss Marriott was very quiet, and scarcely spoke. She begged me to thank you for your message, and regretted that she had not seen you, that was all."

Garth sighed over this brief message, but he understood Queenie's reticence perfectly. "So they are gone, and the happy Brierwood Cottage days are over," he said to himself, as he sat in

the dim, sick room, revolving many things in his mind.

Queenie had a dreary journey. Emmie was so exhausted with excitement and emotion that she slept the greater part of the way, and left her sister in perfect freedom to indulge in all manner of sad thoughts.

Queenie never recalled that day without a shudder. A sadness, indescribable but profound, weighed down her spirits—a feeling of intolerable desolation and loneliness as hour after hour passed on, and the distance lengthened between her and the friends whom she had grown to love.

“Who knows if it may not be good-bye for ever to that dear place?” she thought, “for if he marries Dora I will never willingly see his face again.”

She was thankful when Emmie at last woke up, to find herself at their journey's end. Emmie, whose imagination had been vividly aroused by the idea of the magnificence that awaited them, was rather disappointed by the quiet, old-fashioned hotel to which Dr. Stewart had recommended them. It was just the reverse of

grand, she thought, but the sight of the bright, cheerful-looking room into which the weary travellers were ushered speedily reconciled her, and she was soon comfortably ensconced on the great couch, contentedly watching Queenie as she cut up her chicken.

"Now, Emmie, you must eat that and then go to bed," said her sister decisively, as she carried the tempting tray to the sofa, and Emmie was far too weary and docile to resist.

They were to spend two days in London, but the first few hours hung rather heavily on Queenie's hands. Emmie was fit for nothing but sleep, and could not rouse herself to take interest in anything, and Queenie did not care to leave her or to encounter the crowded streets alone. She spent the greater part of the day sitting idly at the window with her hands on her lap, watching the passers-by with vague, unseeing eyes, and living over every episode of their Hepshaw life.

The next day was better, for Cathy came to them, and the sight of her bright face roused Queenie from her despondency.

"What do you mean by misbehaving like this, Emmie," she said, as she knelt down by the sofa, and took the child in her arms. "Here you are getting ill again and making every one unhappy."

"I couldn't help it, Cathy," returned the child earnestly. "Oh, how good it is to see your dear face again, and how nice you look in that black stuff gown; and do you always wear a funny little close bonnet like that?"

"This is nurse Catherine's costume," replied Cathy, laughing and blushing and looking very handsome. "What do you think Mr. Logan would say to it? and oh, my dear Madam Dignity, how worn and pale you are!"

"It is nothing, I am quite well. Tell me about yourself," returned Queenie, looking fondly at her old chum. "Do you still like your work? does it agree with you?"

"My work is making a woman of me. Did you ever see me look better, Queen?" And indeed Queenie was driven to confess that she had never seen Cathy look more restful and satisfied.

They had a long, quiet-toned conversation while Emmie dozed in the afternoon. Cathy

did not talk much about Emmie. "She was delicate and needed the greatest care," that was all she would allow, but she was voluble on the subject of the loan, and almost overwhelmed her friend with her delighted gratitude.

"He will get on now, dear old fellow, and it is all owing to you," exclaimed the affectionate girl, and somehow Queenie's sore heart felt a little lighter. But on her own affairs Cathy was still very reticent. "I don't know what I am going to do, I have not made up my mind. I shall stay on here and work for a time, I suppose," and then her color deepened, and she broke off rather suddenly.

But later on, as the three sat cosily round the fire and talked of their old feasts in the garret, and Emmie clapped her hands and laughed feebly over many a droll reminiscence, Queenie noticed that now and then the keen grey eyes were full of tears, and that she would look at her and the child rather strangely.

"Good-bye, God bless you both ; and keep up a good heart, Queen," was all she said when she left them that night. But when she re-entered

the hospital an hour later more than one patient noticed nurse Catherine's eyes were red, as though she had been weeping.

It was somewhat late the following afternoon when they drove into St. Leonards and took possession of their new abode. Emmie uttered an exclamation of delight as she looked round the large luxurious room prepared for their reception. A bright fire burnt cheerily, a trim maid-servant was spreading a snowy cloth over the little round table ; the great crimson couch was drawn invitingly near the hearth, outside the pier light twinkled, and a windy flicker flared from the esplanade, while the deep wash and surge of the monotonous waves broke softly on her ears.

"Oh, Queenie, how homelike and delicious it looks ! and oh, what beautiful flowers !"

"Mrs. Bennet must have sent these," returned Queenie gratefully, as she carried the delicate spring bouquet of violets and snowdrops to Emmie. "I am so glad you are pleased with our new home, darling. Look, there is the bay-window you wanted, and behind those folding doors is our bed-room. Mrs. Bennet thought it

would be quiet and snug, and there would be no tiresome stairs for you to climb."

"I am sure Mrs. Bennet must be very nice," was Emmie's answer, and then, as she seemed exhausted and disposed to close her eyes, Queenie prudently left her to repose.

Emmie's favorable opinion of their new acquaintance was soon verified, for the Bennets called the next day, and quite won the sisters' hearts by their geniality and unobtrusive kindness. Dr. Bennet was a little bluff and hasty in manner at first, but as this wore off he and Emmie became excellent friends. His wife was a quiet, motherly-looking woman, and Emmie took a fancy to her on the spot.

"Isn't she just like dear Miss Cosie, Queen, with those grey curls and that comfortable soft voice; if she would only say 'There, there, poor dear,' as Miss Cosie always does," finished the child with a quaint smile.

It was a strange new life that began for Queenie. The links that united her to the old had been suddenly snapped asunder, and she had drifted away into a quiet changeless

existence, which seemed almost as unreal as a dream.

It was as though she had no separate individuality or life of her own ; her only existence was Emmie, her one thought from morning to night how to gratify the child's capricious whims.

When Emmie opened her eyes on waking she always saw her sister by her bedside ; she would stoop over and touch her lips with the fresh, dewy flowers she had in her hand—violets or primroses, or, later on, lilies of the valley and fragrant tea-roses. Emmie loved the roses best.

"I have been out for my morning walk, and look what I have brought you !" Queenie would say. It was always so, always the same surprise, the same sweet morning greeting, the same loving smile ; and so it was through the day.

Strangers began to comment on the tall, graceful girl who drove out her little sister day after day in the pony-carriage, or, as Emmie's strength failed, walked by the side of the Bath chair, where the little frail figure seemed to be lost and hidden. How Emmie loved to watch the ships and the

little brown fishing-smacks ! The shifting groups on the esplanade pleased and amused her ; the music on the pier charmed her. As the daylight faded away, and the waves grew solemn and grey in the twilight, she would lie on her couch contentedly for hours, while Queenie read or sung to her and told her the simple tales of her own production.

" I never dared to think ; I just prayed, and so my little stock of daily strength was recruited, like the widow's cruse," Queenie said very simply long afterwards to one who questioned her of that sad summer. " Life just then meant Emmie to me, and nothing else."

It was true ; she never dared to think. Week by week and month by month the brave-hearted girl crushed down the dull aching pain of weary suspense and doubt ; month by month she bore the loneliness of that sad watching, with the end plainly before her, and yet no complaint of her bitter load of trouble harassed the kind hearts of the friends she had left.

Very brief and touching were her few letters to Langley ; but they told little save the record

of their daily life—"Emmie was no better, or a little weaker," and that was all.

One day, about two months after they had been settled at St. Leonards, a letter came from Garth. The sight of the handwriting made Queenie tremble with sudden emotion; but her face soon paled and saddened as she read it.

It was brief, but kind, and had evidently been written with great care. It spoke of the death of their uncle, who was almost a stranger to his nephews and nieces, but who had taken a fancy to Garth in his last illness and had left him his little all.

"It is not a great fortune," wrote Garth, "it is something less than two or three thousand pounds; but it has quite replaced my unfortunate Bank loss. We are all more thankful than we can say. It makes me especially happy, because I can now repay you the loan you have so generously advanced to me without any further delay. As I am anxious to settle this matter at once, I shall be glad if you will let me know into whose hands I am to pay the money." And then

followed a few kind enquiries after her and Emmie.

Poor Queenie, her answer was very stiff and cold. "How pleased he is to be quit of his obligation to me. How the thought of this debt has galled and harassed him," she thought, as she slowly and laboriously penned those few words. Garth's face grew puzzled and pained as he read them. It is not always easy to read between the lines.

But as the summer wore on Queenie grew graver and sadder, for even to her loving eyes Emmie was slowly but surely fading away.

The change had come on imperceptibly: first the drives in the pony-carriage were discontinued, then the Bath-chair was found too fatiguing; by-and-bye Queenie lifted the child's light form and carried it morning after morning to the couch in the bay-window. There was no question of even walking from one room to another. At the smallest exertion there were long fainting fits that drove Queenie almost frantic with alarm.

"Oh, if only Langley or Cathy could be with me now!" was her one wish. But, alas! there was no hope of this.

She knew there was a troubled household at Church-Stile House. Langley was ill, and Cathy had been summoned home to tend her sister. The long nursing at Karldale Grange had broken down her strength, and as soon as Gertrude Chester had drawn her last breath there had been a sudden collapse that had alarmed her brother.

"She was slightly better, but in a frightfully weak state," Cathy wrote, "and likely to remain so for some time, Dr. Stewart said, and so there was nothing for it but for her to relinquish her hospital work and come home."

"Dr. Stewart calls us the model nurse and patient; and, indeed, Langley is such a patient creature that it is a pleasure to fend for her, as folk say," Cathy wrote. "Poor old Garth took her illness sadly to heart, but after Dr. Stewart's last visit he has seemed more cheerful; and so, you see, why you must do without your Church-Stile House friend, my dear Queenie, though I

am longing from morning to night for a peep at you and Emmie."

Queenie kept the contents of this letter to herself; it would never do to harass the child's mind with any fresh anxiety, so she answered all her questions cheerfully, though with some necessary evasion. "Cathy had gone home, and Langley was overtired and far from strong," that was all she told her.

For Emmie's spirits were drooping with her strength. All manner of anxious thoughts seemed brooding in the childish brain.

"What ails you, darling? What are you thinking about?" Queenie would ask her, anxiously, but for many days she would not answer.

But one evening as she was lying on her couch, watching the rosy gleam on the water fade into grey silvery streaks, while the soft musical wash of the waves seemed to lull her restlessness for a little, she suddenly stretched out her thin arm and drew her sister's head down to the pillow.

"Rest there a few minutes, Queen, you are so

tired, and I want to talk to you. Doesn't the moon look lovely shining through the clouds? How many evenings do you think you and I will have together?"

"Hush, Emmie; only God knows, not you nor I."

"When He says 'Come' I must go, mustn't I, Queen."

"Oh yes, my darling!"

"I am so tired that I shall not mind going. I have almost forgotten what it is to run about and play as other children do. I think it will be nice to lie down and go sliding through the clouds like that girl in the picture, and then when I wake up there will be Nan and Alice, and Uncle Andrew and mamma. Oh, how nice to see mamma again!"

"Nice to leave me, darling?" trying to restrain a sob.

"Ah, that is the only sorrowful part," returned the child, pressing Queenie's head between her weak arms. "Oh, my Queen! my Queen! whatever will you do without me?" and for a short time the sisters' clung to each other, unable to speak.

Queenie was the first to recover herself.

"Never mind, Emmie; you must not fret; God will take care of me."

"Yes, I know, but I cannot help fretting. You look so sad and altered somehow, and all the light has gone out of your dear beautiful eyes; you are so good to me, and you smile and try to be cheerful, but I know—I know all about it, Queen."

"You know what, my precious?"

"Why, I know how lonely you are, and how you miss them all. When I go away," rather timidly, "won't Mr. Garth come and take care of you?"

"Emmie, my darling, what has put such a notion into your head?"

"Isn't it true then?" half crying. "I thought you were fond of him, and liked him better than any one else. Wasn't he the prince in your stories? he was always dark-haired, and tall, and strong, and that made me think of Mr. Garth."

In the dim light a hot flush passed over Queenie's wan face; Emmie softly stroked it with her trembling fingers.

"Ah, you will not answer; but I know all about it. I am only a child, but I love Mr. Garth dearly, dearly. Why doesn't he come and see us, Queen? haven't you told him I am ill?"

"Yes; he knows it," almost inaudibly. -

"Then why does he not come?" she persisted. "If I were not tired I would write to him myself; do you think I could?"

"Not just now, by-and-bye," she replied, hardly thinking of what she was saying, and trying only to quiet her; and Emmie, satisfied with this vague permission, nestled against her sister contentedly, and said no more.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ EMMIE’S LETTER.”

“ I cannot take that anguish’d look to wear
On my calm heart in heaven, as my last,
Last memory of thee until we meet.
Nay, thou must smile on me ; one little smile
Cast like a wild-flower on my misty way
Will make it brighter, and I cannot go
In peace until thou bless me.”

‘ Ezekiel and other Poems.’

EMMIE’S closing remarks that night had left no distinct impression on her sister’s mind ; but Queenie had little idea of the tenacity with which the child brooded over the matter, or how the weary young brain confused itself with endless plans and plotting. That some one must take care of Queenie, that was her one thought.

And so one morning, when Queenie had softly crept out of her room, thinking Emmie’s closed eyelids betokened sleep, and had started for her

fresh morning walk, the child painfully and slowly dragged herself from her bed, and with failing breath, and hands that trembled over their task, penned the pitiful little letter that wrung Garth's heart as he read it.

Queenie found her on her return lying wan and exhausted on her pillow, and bent over her with undisguised anxiety.

"Where is Harriet, darling? She ought not to have neglected you in this way," she exclaimed in distress, putting back the curls from the child's damp forehead.

Emmie only closed her eyes in answer, but an odd little smile hovered round her lips. She knew that Harriet was that moment walking down the Esplanade, towards the red pillar-box on the green.

And this was the letter that Garth read and handed to Langley with undisguised emotion, and over which Langley cried until her feeble strength was nearly exhausted.

"Dear Mr. Garth," it began, "you are such a long way off—you and Langley and Cathy, and we never hear from you now; and Queenie has

left off talking about you, and has taken to sighing instead ; and I want so badly to see you, and have a long, long talk. If you knew how badly, I am sure you would come.

" I don't think people ever die without saying good-bye to their friends, and I want to bid you good-bye, and ask you to take care of Queenie. Some one must take care of her, you know ; and I like you so much, dear Mr. Garth ; and I think no one will be so good and kind to her as you would be.

" Queenie does not know that I am writing this ; she has gone out to buy me some roses. She is doing something for me from morning to night, but I am sure it would make you sad to see her. She never smiles now, and her eyes are always full of tears. She is thinking of the time when she will be missing me. It will be soon now, for I get more tired every day.

" Do come, my dear, dear Mr. Garth. I think I like you next best to any one in the world but Queenie, except perhaps Langley and Cathy. Do come, please, to

" Your loving and tired little Emmie."

Queenie was sadly disturbed by the child's restlessness during that day and the next; all her sweet placidity seemed gone. She was feverish and eager; it was difficult to soothe her. She started at every sound; an opening door, even the stoppage of vehicles in the street, would bring the flush to her white face, and she would sit up among her pillows, palpitating and expectant.

"What is it, Emmie darling? What is the matter?" Queenie would say to her over and over again.

"Oh, it is nothing; I am only very silly," the child would answer, sinking back with a disappointed face. Of course her letter had not reached him, it was such a long, long way off. How was it possible for him to come yet? And then a new fear tormented her. If he delayed at all, if he took a long time to think about it, would he be in time?

It was on the evening of the second day when this fresh thought began to harass her. The day had been hot and thundery, and she had suffered much from the oppression of the atmosphere.

When Dr. Bennet saw her that night he let fall a word or two that stirred Queenie's numb pain to sharp, positive agony.

"You think she is worse, Dr. Bennet? I can read it in your face," she asked, her poor hands working with the effort to keep calm.

"I think there is a change of some sort; you must be prepared for anything now, my dear Miss Marriott. Poor little soul, one cannot wish her to suffer," continued the warm-hearted doctor, who had daughters of his own.

"No; I do not wish her to suffer, God forbid that I should be so selfish; but oh, Emmie!" and then she turned away, lest the bitter flood of her sorrow should overwhelm her. There would be time enough to weep when her work was finished, she needed all her strength for Emmie now.

But that night there was no sleep for her eyes. Hour after hour she sat beside the failing child; fanning her softly, watching her through her short intervals of sleep, and listening to the dull lapping of the waves on the sand.

Once she dozed off and lost herself. The shaded sick-room had disappeared, the monotonous

wash of the surge had lulled to sleep her drowsy ear. She was at Church-Stile House again. There was the plane-tree walk, and the church. The little gate swung lightly on its hinges ; a dark, handsome face looked in at the window and smiled at her ; and she woke with a start to find raindrops pattering against the window, and the night-lamp paling beside the grey dawn.

"I don't think that I shall get up to-day, so I shall not tire your poor arms," was Emmie's plaintive remark that morning.

"Do you feel weaker, my darling ? would you rather be spared the trouble of dressing ?"

"Yes ; I would rather lie still and be quiet. If you open the folding doors I can see a little bit of the sea, and it does not sound so loud here. I think it is coming, Queen ; and oh, I did want to be a little longer with you !"

"What is coming, my pet ?" for the child's voice was very sad, and the tears were rolling down her cheeks. "Oh, don't cry, Emmie ! I would rather endure a lifetime of sorrow than see you shed a single tear," and Queenie trembled all over.

"But it is so hard," sobbed the child. "I only wanted this, and then I could have gone so happily ; just to say good-bye, and to know that he was taking care of you. I have so prayed for it ; and now he will come too late. Hush ! what is that, Queen ? There are footsteps in the next room, did you hear them ?"

"It is only Dr. Bennet, my darling," returned her sister, marvelling at her exceeding agitation. Whom did she expect ? What impossible arrival was she conjuring up in her sick brain ? "Hush ! it is only Dr. Bennet, he promised to come early, and we have no other visitor, you know. Lie down again, Emmie, and I will bring him to you."

The sunshine streamed through the bay window as she closed the folding doors behind her softly.

"I am so thankful you have come, Dr. Bennet," she began breathlessly, and then she stopped, and her heart seemed to cease beating for a moment.

"I am not Dr. Bennet, but I trust you are not sorry to see me," said a familiar voice in her

ear, the voice that had vibrated through her waking and sleeping dreams; and there was Garth looking at her, and holding out his hand, with his old kind smile.

"You here? you, of all people in the world!" she gasped, for she was dazed with want of sleep, and the sudden appearance of this dearest friend seemed to her more dream-like than real; even the pressure of his hand scarcely reassured her. "I am so stupid, I don't seem to believe it somehow," she said, wrinkling her brows, and looking at him with such grave, unsmiling eyes that Garth grew almost as grave as she.

"Emmie sent for me; she wrote such a sweet little childish letter that I could not keep away. Why did you not send for me if things were as bad as this?" looking down at her pale face with mingled feelings of pity and love. Worn and jaded and weary as she looked, with all her brightness quenched, he felt it was the dearest face in the world to him.

"Emmie sent for you, and I never knew it! then it is you she has been expecting these two days. Oh, Mr. Clayton, do you know that she

is dying ; that I shall soon be without her, the only thing that belongs to me in the whole world?" and moved by the sympathy of his face, Queenie sank down on the couch, and covered her face with her hands.

"Yes, I know all about it, and Langley and I are more sorry for you than I can say. Cathy wanted to come with me, but she could not leave Langley."

"But you came. Oh, it is so good of you ; and this is such a poor welcome," trying to smile at him through her tears.

"I could not expect otherwise," he returned, in an odd, constrained voice, for he was just then restraining with difficulty the longing to take her in his arms and comfort her like a child. Did she understand his feelings ? he wondered, for there was a little flush in her face as she moved away, saying that she would tell Emmie.

"May I come with you ?" he asked ; but he followed her without permission, and so caught the child's first look of ecstasy.

"Oh, Mr. Garth, Mr. Garth !" was all she

said, and then she nestled down contentedly in his strong arms, and laid her head on his shoulder, and the weak hands went up and stroked his face.

"You see I have come, dear Emmie," he said at last, very gently. "I have answered your letter in person. You were sure of me, were you not?"

"Yes, I was sure," she answered, doubtfully. "But last night I got unhappy, for I feared it would be too late. And now you are going to promise me to take care of Queenie?"

"Emmie, my dear one, hush!" exclaimed poor Queenie, for her cheeks were flaming at this.

"Let the child speak," he returned very quietly, but firmly; "we must not let her have anything on her mind. And she wrote to me, you know. Emmie has always had faith in me," with an intonation that made Queenie droop her head and be ashamed of her doubts.

"Yes; do let me speak, Queen; I have been so dreadfully unhappy, and I have not much breath for this odd-catching in my throat. Mr.

Garth, I am not wrong ; you do love Queenie, do you not ?"

"Yes, dearly," was the unexpected response, very gravely made.

"Oh, I am so glad !" trying to clap her hands in her old way ; but they dropped heavily, and he caught them. "And you will promise me to take care of her, and try and make her happy all her life ?"

"Yes, by God's help, and if she will have it so," in a low but very distinct tone. And now his hand sought hers, and kept it.

"Let him go now, my darling," exclaimed Queenie, wildly, and hardly knowing what she would say, and only conscious of the strong pressure of the hand that held hers. "All this is making you worse." And oh, what would he think of them both ?

"No ; it makes me happy," returned the child, faintly. "Now I am quite ready to go to sleep as Nan did. You have not kissed her, Mr. Garth. And is there not something else that people always do ?" a little restlessly. "I thought they wore a ring, or something ?"

He half smiled at that, and drew off the heavy seal ring from his little finger. "Let us humor her," his eyes seemed to say to Queenie; and weak and confused, she hardly knew how to resist. The ring was on her finger before she knew it, and he had lightly touched her cheek with his lips. "What does it matter, dear? we understood each other before this," she heard him say; "at least you must have understood me." And then he rose from his seat and placed the child in her arms.

The rest of the day was a dream to Queenie; she never stirred from Emmie's side. Garth came in and out in a quiet, business-like way, but he never stayed long. Once or twice he brought some refreshment to her, and remained beside her until she had taken it. "You must eat it, or you will be ill," he said, very gravely, when she would have refused it. After the first, Emmie seemed hardly conscious of his presence; a fainting fit had followed the excitement of the morning, and there had been only a partial rally. She lay through the remainder of the day motionless and speechless, with her hand in her sister's,

and a faint flicker of her old innocent smile round her lips. Once only she brightened visibly when Garth stooped and kissed her. " Now I am happy," Queenie heard her say. " Dear Mr. Garth, I know he will take care of her !"

It was late in the evening when she roused to full consciousness. The day had been sultry, and the folding doors had been flung open, and now a pleasant breeze swept from the sea and blew refreshingly through the room. Garth was pacing up and down on the balcony. The moon had already risen, and a broken pathway of light seemed to stretch over the dark water. By-and-bye a star trembled on the edge of a long fleecy cloud. Through the open window he could catch a glimpse of the little fair form propped up with pillows, with the patient figure beside it ; now and then a low tone reached his ears.

" Are we alone, Queen ? Where is Mr. Garth ?"

" He is out there, looking at the sea ; it is so beautiful to-night. Shall I call him, dear ?"

" No ; I like to feel that we are alone together once more, just you and I. We have always been so happy together, have we not, Queen ?"

"Yes, yes, my darling."

"There will be so many waiting for me there—mamma and papa, and Uncle Andrew, and Nan, and Captain Fawcett's little girl; but sometimes I am afraid that I shall miss you very badly, dear. I hope it is not wicked to feel that."

"No, of course not, my pet; but God will take care of that; He will not let you miss me too much."

"Never to be tired again, how strange that will be!" continued the dying child.

Queenie softly repeated the words, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"Ah, that sounds nice. You always say such comforting things. I know I have tired you dreadfully, Queen, and made you very unhappy, but you will soon be better, will you not?"

"I will try," in a faint voice, striving to repress her agitation, for a strange, indefinable expression seemed stealing over the child's face.

"When you are sad you must say to yourself, 'Emmie likes me to be happy,' and then you will feel better, you know; but I can't talk any more,

the sea sounds so close. Kiss me and say good night, Queen."

A little while afterwards, when Garth stole softly to the door of the sick room, the sisters were still clinging together; but going still closer, he saw that Queenie was unconsciously rocking a dead face upon her bosom.

He had taken the child from her arms, and then led her gently from the room, and she had not resisted him; she only laid her face down on the arm of the chair where he had placed her, and wept as though the very flood-gates of her being were unloosed.

"Yes, cry, dear, it will do you good," was all he said to her, but for a long time he stood beside her; just smoothing her soft hair with his hand, but tenderly, as though she were a child, until the first bitterness of her anguish was past, and then she said quietly that she must go back to Emmie.

"But not to-night, dear, surely not to-night!" looking down with infinite pity at her poor drowned face and half-extinguished eyes.

"Yes; to-night. No one must do anything for her but me; it is only putting her to bed for the last time, you know," in so pitiful a voice that it broke his resolution.

"Ah, well, I must not hinder you, I suppose, but I only wish I knew what was right in such a case. If only Langley or Cathy were here!"

"I will not stay long, I will promise you that."

"Then I will trust you. Remember you belong to me now, Emmie gave you to me," and then he took her in his arms and kissed her forehead, and let her go.

But he did not see her again for three whole days. Her work was finished, and the brave, bright spirit had given way at last. The next day she was too ill to rise, and lay looking at the flowers he sent her, and some locks of fair hair that she had cut from Emmie's head. It was not until the evening of the second day that she crept for an hour to Emmie's room. Garth was out, but on his return they showed him the results of her handiwork.

The child looked fair as a sculptured angel, laid under a perfect quilt of flowers—roses white

and creamy, and delicate cape-jessamine. A cross of frail white blossoms lay on her breast; some half-opened rose-buds had been pushed into her dead hand, but on the sweet lips lay Emmie's own smile.

"Never to be tired more!" could one look at that perfect rest, that marble calm, and wish the worn-out child back to suffer again? Queenie could not, though she wept, and wept as though her heart were broken; though at night she stretched out her empty arms in the darkness, and no light form nestled into them. "It is well with my darling now," she would sob.

It was in the evening of the third day when Garth saw her again; he had sent her a little note, telling her of some necessary arrangements that he had made, and she had come down to him in her black dress, and with the palest face he had ever seen.

"How ill—how dreadfully ill you look," he said in a shocked voice, as he sprang to meet her. "My dear Queenie, this is not right; they ought not to have permitted you to rise."

"Mrs. Bennet thought the change down-stairs

might do me good," she returned, in a weak, hollow voice that scarcely seemed to belong to her; "and I—I wanted to see you, and thank you for what you have done."

"And my arrangements have satisfied you?"

"Perfectly and entirely."

"That is well," smiling at her; "then I have not worked in vain. And you"—hesitating a little, "you will be guided by my advice about the day after to-morrow."

"Oh no, I cannot," clasping her hands with a little sob. "Dr. Bennet says it will not really hurt me, if I have set my heart on going, and I am stronger—much stronger now."

"But you will faint—something will surely happen to you; you are unfit to move," he remonstrated.

"No, I will be very good, if you will only take me," she implored. "If you refuse, I shall lose heart altogether, and then indeed I shall be worse; please give way to me in this;" and he reluctantly consented.

But he need not have feared for her. Queenie went through the painful ordeal with a calmness

that surprised him. True she trembled a good deal, and the brown eyes looked cloudy with unshed tears, and once she quitted his arm, and knelt down and kissed the sods that covered her darling; but there was no undue manifestation of grief, and he left her quiet and outwardly calm when he walked back to his hotel.

But the next evening he found her looking worn and ill; she was sitting by the window with a little old Bible of Emmie's in her lap. She laid it aside as she greeted him.

"Do you know that I must be going back to Hepshaw, and that you and I must have some conversation together?" he said in a meaning voice, as he took the chair beside her. She changed color at that, and then he saw her nervously pulling off the seal ring from her finger.

"I must not forget that this is your property," she said, not looking at him, but straight out of the window; and he saw that her face and even her throat were suffused with crimson. "I know how kindly you meant it, and I ought to have given it back before."

"It is certainly a shabby old ring, but you might have kept it until I had replaced it by another," taking possession of the hand and the ring too.

"But—but it all meant nothing," she stammered. "It was good of you to quiet my darling, and give in to her fancy, but of course I understood that it all meant nothing."

"Did it mean nothing when I took you in my arms and kissed you the other night?"

"Oh, Mr. Clayton, how can you?" turning away and covering her face with her hand; he had still possession of the other.

"Did it mean nothing that I told Emmie that I loved you dearly, and would care for you, God helping me, all my life? did you say a dissenting word then?"

"No; I was too stunned, too overwhelmed. I could say or do nothing at all."

"Do you mean to tell me now that you will have nothing to do with my love? that it is valueless to you, Queenie? Surely you can care for me a little!" with such a loving glance that she could not meet it.

"It is not that—that I cannot care, I mean ; you know that there are other things in the way."

"Do you mean your money ? I have been thinking over that all these months, and I have come to the conclusion that I have been a sorry coward in the matter. Things somehow look to me quite different. If we love each other—if you can care for me as your words seem to imply—why should this trumpery money part us ? I would rather have you without it," after a pause, during which she had not spoken. "I would prefer your being our schoolmistress still ; but it can't be helped. Besides, I am in a better position myself, and business is flourishing ; and, whatever people say, I shall never need to live on my wife's money. You see I am speaking openly to you, dear, and as though things were already settled between us."

"Yes ; but Dora ! how about Dora ?" and now he felt the trembling of the hand he held.

He became grave at that, all the more that he read the unspoken anxiety in her eyes.

"I will tell you all about that if you are sure

you can listen." And as she signified her assent, he told her briefly of his old connection with Dora, and his intentions concerning her ; and how she had repulsed him and kept him at bay until he had risen against her tyranny, and had at last freed himself. "It was not love that I felt for her at all ; I found that out in time to save us from a life-time of misery. I never knew what love was till I came that night in the gloaming and saw you kneeling on the hearth, my darling, with the plate of cakes in your hand."

"Did you love me then ?" very shyly.

"Then and ever afterwards. Do not let Dora be mentioned again between us, she is only my old playmate and friend. She never has been, she never can be, the one woman in the world to me ; you only can be that."

And Queenie believed him. And so Garth replaced the old seal ring on her finger. "Only until I can find one more worthy of your acceptance," as he said to her.

"But I never mean to part with this," she returned tearfully. "You put it on to please

dear Emmie, and it made her happy to see it. Oh, Garth, was it not good of my darling to bring us together?” And Queenie hid her face on his arm and wept with mingled sorrow and joy.

CHAPTER XV.

GARTH'S WIFE.

"Sole partner, and sole part of all these joys,
Dearer thyself than all."—*Milton*.

IT cost Garth a severe struggle to leave his betrothed and go back to his business at Hephshaw; but his presence was imperatively needed at the quarry, and Queenie, with her usual unselfishness and good sense, was the first to perceive the necessity.

"How can I find it in my heart to leave you just now?" he said the next morning, when he had walked up from his hotel to spend an hour or two with her. Perhaps her deep mourning made her seem so thin and pale; but there was certainly a wasted look about her, as though she had passed through a long illness.

"But you must leave me," she replied gently.

"You are wanted at Warstdale ; and then Langley needs you. I will not have you neglect your duties for me ; you have been here already ten days, have you not ?"

"Yes ; but Langley has Cathy, and you are all alone," he remonstrated. "Dear Queenie, could you not rouse yourself and come back with me ? and we would all nurse you well again."

She shook her head sadly.

"No, no ; Cathy has enough on her hands, you do not want another invalid at Church-Stile House ; besides, I am not fit to travel just now, Dr. Bennet said so only yesterday. He told me I must have quiet and rest."

"You know he and his wife have offered to take care of you. What good Samaritans they are !"

"Yes, indeed, they are everything that is kind ; but, Garth," hesitating shyly over his name, "you will not ask me to do that. They are very good, dear people, but they are comparative strangers. I could not bear to leave this place ; I am only just fit to lie and look at the sea all day, and think of you and Emmie."

"I know it will be bad for you ; but I don't see what else is to be done," he returned despondingly. "Warstdale won't do without me ; but I shall not have a moment's peace until I have you safely in my own keeping. Will you promise to be well in a fortnight, if I come back and fetch you ?"

"A fortnight is too short a time, I shall hardly be strong then," with a sigh of mental and bodily weakness that was sad to hear.

Dear as his presence was to her, and sweet the knowledge of their mutual love, it taxed her over-wrought strength sorely to sit and talk to him.

"Three weeks, then ? I cannot be longer without seeing you."

"I will try to be ready for you then," she answered, with one of her rare, sweet smiles. Then, as she read the unspoken anxiety in his eyes, "Indeed, you must not be troubled about me ; I will not fret more than I can help, and I have such sweet, happy thoughts about my darling ; and then I cannot feel really lonely when I have you. Oh, Garth, if you only knew how

different life looks to me now!" and for a little while she clung to him.

But though she sent him away half comforted she knew that she never needed him so sorely as during the miserable days of prostration and nervous depression that followed his departure; and but for very shame she would have recalled him.

For a little time she was utterly broken, and could only lie and weep, and pray that strength might be given her to bear her trouble. For ever through the lonely days and in the darkness of her sleepless nights Emmie's plaintive voice seemed sounding in her ears—"We have been so happy together, have we not, Queen?" The last clasp of the weak arms round her—she could feel their touch still; and the heavy drop of the head that Garth had lifted so tenderly from her bosom. Was she dead? She had not known it; even now she never thought of her as dead. During the brief snatches of slumber that came to her she was for ever carrying the light figure to and fro; there were the fair curls, the great, solemn blue eyes, the innocent smile playing

round her mouth. "Am I very heavy? do I tire your arms, Queen? Oh, it is so nice to be together, just you and I!"

But Queenie bravely battled with her sorrow; and she was not without her consolation. Letters came to her from Church-Stile House—sweet, loving ones from Langley and Cathy, and others that she read with a happy smile, and hid under her pillow.

Garth's letters were very short and kind. They were not specially lover-like, there was no protestation of affection in them; but the whole breathed a spirit of quiet, watchful tenderness—the tenderness that a good man gives to the woman who has entrusted her future to him.

How Queenie loved these letters; they seemed to give fresh life to her.

"You have had good news, I can see," Dr. Bennet would say to her when he came in, and found her a little less languid, and with a faint color in her cheeks.

He was very watchful over the girl, and almost fatherly in his manner to her; he drove her himself to the cemetery when she craved for another

sight of the little green mound. There was to be a marble cross at the head, and the little garden ground was to be planted with all the flowers that Emmie loved—her favorite roses, and in the spring time snowdrops and violets and lilies of the valley. Kind-hearted Mrs. Bennet promised to look after it when Queenie should be away in her northern home.

Garth's secret source of uneasiness when he had reached Hepshaw, and had received his sisters' delighted congratulations, was how he should break the news to Dora, and how she would receive it? He had made a clean breast of the whole thing to Queenie, as in duty bound, and then had bade her dismiss the matter from her mind. Dora and he were unsuited for each other; they were just old playmates and friends, that was all. He had no idea that Dora in her jealous desperation had appealed to Queenie, nor was Queenie ever likely to inform him.

Should he send Cathy over to Crossgill Vicarage to break the news, or should he write a little note to the Vicar? Somehow he shrank from

writing to the girl herself, but before he could make up his mind the difficulty was solved for him.

One of those endless little notes, inviting him to a business consultation with Mr. Cunningham, reached him about three days after his arrival, but this time Flo had written it. Dora had hurt her hand, but she sent her kind regards to Mr. Clayton, and would he do them the pleasure, as papa wanted him so badly, and so on? Of course Dora had dictated the clever little letter.

Garth winced and reddened over it, and something like "Confound these clever women" sounded through his moustache; but, all the same, he told himself that he must go. "I have been a fool for my pains, and I suppose I must pay the penalty for being a fool," he thought, with a shrug of his shoulders; but the idea of that drawing-room at Crossgill Vicarage was odious to him.

No one need have envied him when he got into his dog-cart and drove along the familiar road. He had resolved to brave it out, and had written a very friendly and facetious answer to

Flo. Nevertheless, he was very nervous and confused when he followed old nurse across the little hall.

By some accident he was unusually late, and they were all in the drawing-room, even Mr. Cunningham, who gently scolded him for his want of punctuality.

"He is not so very late, papa; and cook can easily put back the dinner a quarter of an hour," observed Dora, placidly. She had met Garth in a perfectly friendly manner. "Mr. Clayton, will you go up-stairs at once, please, it does not matter in the least, only papa is so methodical in his ways. Our dinner hour ought to have been enrolled among the laws of the Medes and Persians."

"As I ought to have known by this time," returned Garth, with a nervous laugh, and then he took himself off, and found old nurse unpacking his portmanteau.

Dinner passed over pretty comfortably. He could talk with the girls, and, as he was a favorite with them, they found plenty to say to him. Dora was rather quiet, but she was perfectly

good-humored, though perhaps a trifle dignified ; but in her white dress she looked almost as young and girlish as her sisters.

Still it was a relief when he and Mr. Cunningham were left to their business *tête-à-tête*, and he could relax a little from his company manners. When they had disposed of their business the Vicar seemed inclined to settle himself to his usual nap, but Garth began to fidget.

"I won't keep you a moment, and I must go into the drawing-room. But you are such an old friend, Mr. Cunningham, that I thought—" and then he managed to blurt it out.

The Vicar was wide awake enough now.

"Dear, dear," he observed, in a perplexed and slightly annoyed voice, "who would have thought of this? Does Dora — do the girls know?"

"Not at present ; but I am going in to tell them."

"Do so, do so by all means," with a glance towards the door. "They will be surprised, of course ; I am. Who would have dreamed you were such a deep fellow, Garth, and taking us all

in like this? And the young woman has money, eh?"

"I am sorry to say Miss Marriott has a large fortune," returned Garth, stiffly. "Neither of us wanted it."

"Of course not; but, all the same, you have managed to do a good thing for yourself. Young and rich and good-looking. Well, my dear fellow, I congratulate you, though I own I never was more surprised in my life." And Mr. Cunningham sighed as he stretched out his white hands to the fireless grate. Evidently the news had not pleased him.

"I am in for it now," thought Garth, as he opened the drawing-room door. Of course Dora was alone, he expected that; but he could see the slim figures of the girls passing to and fro between the flower-beds. To his surprise Dora bade him call them in.

"Unless you would like to go out and join them," she said, just lifting her eyes from her work, but not inviting him by word or gesture to sit down.

"I hope you don't mean to dismiss me like

this," he returned lightly. "We will go out to the girls by-and-bye, but just now I have something I want to tell you."

"I thought you never wanted to tell me things now," she answered, plaintively, and her bosom heaved a little, and her blue eyes began to soften and gleam dangerously.

"Oh yes, I do; you must not say such unkind things to me, Dora. I hope I may tell my old playmate of a piece of good fortune that has befallen me. I wonder whether it will be news to you, or whether my visit south will have enlightened you. Do you know I am going to be married?"

"To whom?" she asked. But she did not flinch, neither did her voice change in the least.

"To Miss Marriott."

"Of course I knew it," she returned, taking up her work and sewing hurriedly. "You know you told me on your last visit that Miss Marriott had come into a large fortune. I congratulate you, Mr. Clayton, you have done exceedingly well for yourself."

If she had wished to mortify and exasperate him she had entirely succeeded.

"Why do you and your father speak as though Miss Marriott's fortune was any inducement?" he returned, hotly. "Surely you know me better than that! It is the money that has been the stumbling-block all these months. I would marry her gladly and proudly if she had not a penny, and were still the school-mistress of Hepshaw."

"Ah, you always were Quixotic," was the repressive answer.

Garth was silent. He was inwardly provoked that she chose to misunderstand him; and he had a sore feeling that, after all their friendship, she should not have a kind word for him. But, looking at her, he saw that she had grown strangely pale, and that her hand was trembling; and then his heart grew very soft.

"Don't let us quarrel," he implored. "We have always been such good friends, have we not, Dora? You know there is no one except Miss Marriott and my sisters whom I can compare with you, I have always so trusted and

respected you. You will wish me God-speed in my new life, will you not?"

"Yes, Mr. Clayton, I will wish you that," she returned, very calmly, as she took up her work again. "Now you must go and call in the girls, as Flo is delicate and the dews are falling."

But Garth did a strange thing before he went, for, as he stood looking at his old playmate a little sadly and tenderly, he suddenly stooped over her and touched the little hands with his lips. He had had a sort of tenderness for her, and now the tie was broken between them. But whatever she thought of the liberty Dora never spoke or raised her head, and for the rest of the evening she was very quiet.

Garth breathed more freely after this; but time hung heavily on his hands until the stipulated three weeks were over, and he could start for St. Leonards. He and his sisters held long consultations together about the future. Queenie was to pay them a long, long visit, and was to recover her strength; and early in the spring he would persuade her, in spite of her deep mourning, to marry him quietly.

"She is all alone, and there is plenty of room for us," as both he and Langley agreed.

But he grumbled sadly over her looks when he saw her again: the beautiful eyes had not regained their old brightness, though they looked so lovingly at him.

"I have wanted you! how I have wanted you!" she whispered, as she came, oh, so gladly, into his out-stretched arms.

"Not more than I have wanted you, my darling."

"Oh, yes; more, a great deal more; but now you are here all will be well with me. I am very weak still, but I know you will take care of me, and be patient until I get bright again."

"My dearest, can you doubt it?" he returned very gravely. And indeed he was good to her, too good she sometimes thought.

But it needed all his support and tenderness to make the long journey even bearable to her; and she was sadly exhausted when they drove over the little bridge and under the dark plane-trees, and he lifted her down and placed her in Langley's arms.

She and Cathy almost wept over the girl's altered looks.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, how shall we comfort you!" cried poor Cathy, kneeling down beside her, and trying not to burst into tears.

"We must leave that to time and Garth, and only be as good to her as we can," returned her sister gently, and then she took the tired face between her hands and kissed it tenderly and laid it on her breast.

But it was not in human nature to resist all the sweet, wholesome sympathy that surrounded her; and Queenie was young and beloved, besides loving with all her heart. As the days and weeks passed away courage and strength returned to her. It was not that Emmie was forgotten,—deep in her inmost soul lay the image of that dearly-loved sister,—but that her glorious young vitality asserted itself.

"How can I remain so dreadfully unhappy when I have you?" she would whisper to Garth when they paced up and down their favorite plane-tree walk in the sunset; and indeed any girl might have been proud of such a lover.

They had no reserves, these two. Queenie would tell him all her innocent thoughts—how lonely she had felt when she had seen him and Dora together, and how she had watched, night after night, for the red flicker of his cigar as he walked underneath the plane-trees; and Garth listened to her, and though he said very little in reply Queenie was perfectly content.

For day by day the sweet conviction came to her that she was growing deeper into her lover's heart, that the sympathy between them was ever greater; their delight in each other's presence was quiet but intense; speech seemed unnecessary to them, they understood each other without a word.

When two months had passed, and Queenie announced her intention of going to Carlisle and taking up her abode for the present with Caleb Runciman, he let her go almost without a word, though the sunshine seemed to die out of the old house with her presence; and when Langley would have remonstrated he silenced her at once.

"She thinks it will be best, and perhaps she is right. Of course we shall have a dull winter, but

it will be worse for her, shut up with that old man ; but in the spring she has promised things shall be as I wish." And a flush crossed Garth's handsome face as he spoke, for the thought of bringing home his wife was very sweet and sacred to the young man.

So Queenie spent the long winter months in the narrow little house in the High Street, with only Caleb and Molly. But it was not such a dull life after all. Friends came over from Hepshaw to see her—Faith Stewart, and Miss Cosie, and now and then Langley and Cathy, and every week brought Garth. Queenie and he would take long walks together. How she loved to show him her old haunts—Granite-Lodge, and the Close, and her favorite nook in the Cathedral ! Now and then they would walk over to the castle where poor Mary Queen of Scots had been incarcerated, and gaze up at the little window out of which Fergus Vich Ian Vohr used to look. The sentries would look after them as they strolled across the place—the tall, good-looking fellow, with the slight girl wrapped in furs beside him.

"What a color you have, my Queen! and how bright your eyes are!" he would say, for, half in jest and half in loving reality, he often called her "my Queen," and she would look up and smile, well pleased that she had found favor in his eyes.

And so one day in the early spring, when the violets and crocuses were growing on Emmie's grave, there was a quiet wedding at Carlisle, and Queenie became Garth Clayton's wife.

It was a very quiet wedding, only Langley and Cathy and Ted were there, and Mr. Logan came over to marry them. She had worn bridal-white, but after the ceremony she had resumed her mourning.

"Garth did not mind," she said, "and she was unwilling to put it off unless he wished it."

Garth was too perfectly happy to find fault with anything. A holiday was a rare thing with him, and he and Queenie had planned it to the best advantage, in a tour through Normandy. Queenie had never been abroad, and Garth had only once left England. The change of scene would be good for both of them.

When May was over they came back to Hepshaw, and settled down quietly, "as sober married people," Garth would say, with a proud look at his young wife.

It was a happy household at Church-Stile House. Queenie's good sense and sweetness of temper averted even the ordinary jars that are liable to occur in the most united family. In her husband's eyes she was simply faultless.

"Where is my wife?" was always his first question if she were not in the porch to meet him. "My wife"—he seemed never weary of saying it.

"How can you spoil any man so, Mrs. Clayton," Dora said to her once, on one of her rare visits to Church-Stile House.

Garth had taken his wife more than once to Crossgill Vicarage, but Dora's ponies seldom drove now through the Hepshaw lanes. "Beatrix was going to be married, and she was so busy." There was always some excuse; but she was quite pleasant and friendly to Queenie when they met, though there was no special sympathy between them. But Queenie could never rid her-

self of a secret feeling of embarrassment in Dora's presence. That conversation lay as a barrier between them; she even felt a little self-reproach when Garth once hinted that Dora looked older and more worn than she used to look. Was it possible that she had really cared for him so much after all?

If she had she kept her secret well and fulfilled all her duties admirably. She married both her sisters, becoming the most inveterate match-maker for their sakes; and she soothed her father's declining years with the utmost dutifulness.

When he was dead, and she was no longer young, she took a step that surprised her friends considerably, for she married a wealthy widower with three middle-aged daughters, who had come to live lately at a grand old place called Dingle Hall.

"They are only *nouveaux richesses*, my dear," as an ill-natured widow remarked, "and he has made all his money in trade; but Dora Cunningham cannot live without managing somebody."

If she managed him she did it admirably, for

he and her step-daughters almost worshipped her. She was a young-looking woman still, and knew how to make the best of herself; and Dingle Hall was soon famed for its hospitality and the good taste of its mistress.

But long before that time there had been many and great changes at Church-Stile House. First the new house had been built on the little piece of sloping meadow-land looking over Hepshaw—Warstdale Manor, as it was called, and the master of Warstdale had taken up his abode there, but not until Langley had left them to become Harry Chester's wife.

And by-and-bye there was another wedding.

“What do you think Cathy has told me?” exclaimed Garth one day, when he found his wife sitting alone in their favorite room—a handsome library, with a side window commanding a view of Church-Stile House and the church. “I really think the girl must be clean daft to dream of such a thing, but she declares that with or without my consent she means to marry Logan.”

“Well?” and Queenie laid down her work and smiled placidly in his face.

"Well, how can you sit there in that provokingly unconcerned way, you very tiresome woman, and looking exactly as though it were no news to you at all? our Cathy, too!"

"Because I have expected it all along," returned his wife calmly. "I knew, however much she might resist it, that in the end she would be true to herself and him."

"Why, if this is not enough to try a man's patience," exclaimed Garth, quite irritably for him. "You talk as though you approve of this monstrous match."

"So I do. Mr. Logan is a good man; and then he loves Cathy so dearly."

"But he is double her age; he is forty-five if he is a day, and Cathy not more than three-and-twenty. Why, they will look like a father and daughter! The very idea is absurd!"

"The discrepancy between their ages is a pity of course," returned Queenie, with an admiring look at her own "gude-man." Garth was handsomer than ever, every one said so. "But I know one thing, that Cathy will never fancy any one

else." And, as usual, Garth soon discovered that his wife's surmises were correct.

"So you are going to stand on tiptoe all your life, trying to get a peep at your husband's excellences?" Queenie said to her, with a lively recollection of a conversation between them. "Oh, you foolish Cathy!"

"No; I am the wise Catherine now," returned her friend. "You see we poor women can't escape our fate after all. I am tired of running away from myself and him, and pretending not to care for his liking me; so I just told him that he must put up with me, faults and all, for I won't promise to mend; but if I am not the better for being with him—" and then she stopped suddenly, and her eyes were full of tears. "Oh, Queenie, don't laugh at me, and don't let Garth say a word against it; for, though he were as old as my father, I love and honor and venerate him, and I mean to take care of him, and make him happy all his life long."

And Cathy kept her word. Garth grumbled a good deal, and would not be reconciled, and turned sulky when he met them strolling up the

lane together; but even he was driven at last to confess that it had made a woman of Cathy, and that it had not turned out amiss after all.

Mr. Logan was no longer poor when they married, and it was by her brother's advice that they left Miss Cosie to take care of the vicarage, and came to live at Church-Stile House, where Ted was holding solitary state.

But before that migration was accomplished, there was a new arrival at Warstdale Manor. Queenie's boy was now two years old, and this time it was a small, fair girl that they placed in Garth's arms.

"Our little daughter," he whispered tenderly. "What shall we call her, my wife?"

But though no word crossed Queenie's lip the look in the brown eyes were all-sufficient, and he hastened to answer—

"It shall be as you wish, Queenie dearest. Of course I knew what you would say; we will call our little darling Emmie."

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